PENGUIN BOOKS

THE BODLEY HEAD

THE HOUNDS OF SPRING

SYLVIA THOMPSON

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Sylvia Thompson

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO THE MIND OF

H. G. WELLS

AND TO

PETER LULING

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FOREWORD

It is possibly presumptuous to try to deal, however indirectly and romantically, with the essential tendencies of a decade, 1914–1924, into which one entered at the age of eleven. It is possibly, at a time when change has been so swift and fundamental, so complex and so extensive in the social and political life of civilisation, a breach of the laws of historical perspective to hover round a decade so lately wrought, and not yet cool from the furnace of the present; to inspect it, as it were, at one moment with a telescope, the next with a microscope—and by way of alternative to view it through green or rose-coloured spectacles.

Possibly, too, one presumes in believing that Edgar and Colin Russell, Zina and Wendy are in their infinitesimal way the human atoms which, fused by Events, go to make that subtle mass of stuff that solidifies into History.

But one dares to justify a fragmentary, perhaps frivolous, novel by the words of Sir John Seely:

"Modern History is a subject to which neither beginning nor end can be assigned. No beginning because *the dense web of the fortunes of man is woven without a void; because in society as in nature the structure is continuous and we can trace things back uninterruptedly.* . . . No end because . . . history made and history making are scientifically inseparable and separately unmeaning."

The italics are mine.

S. T.

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I

PRE-WAR

"While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain."

Ecclesiastes.

PART ONE

I

Edgar Renner dozed and ruminated through the July afternoon. He reclined in a deck chair, allowing the sunshine to envelop him so that his body and mind were permeated through and through by its warmth, by a pervasive and almost tangible contentment, and his consciousness soothed by a humming in the air which reached him as elusively and incessantly as did the perfumes of the flowers and grass and distant hay-fields. Every now and then a fly settled on his whitish moustache or on his tufty eyebrows, or bemused itself among the lines at the outer corners of his eyelids or tickled his neck just above the collar of his soft silk shirt, and was discouraged by the sudden jerk and sweep of a fly-whisk—a weapon which resembled the tail of a rocking horse belonging to Edgar's youngest daughter.

Edgar was not, in any active manner, "thinking"; but in his pleasant post-prandial passivity thoughts came to him, and reflections, and drowsily-framed memories, and he received and enjoyed them as he did the sunshine, letting them have their way with him. Thoughts came to him: ". . . that these English flies, touching you like little cool spots of rain, were as nothing to . . . Egypt . . . those hot countries that he had known; and Sicily, Spain, even in his early youth in Austria. The hot summer days in Vienna—sun blazing on the grand, proud streets and buildings; ladies with parasols driving up and down the Prater in their carriages, and the Guards at the Burg, and the Emperor; the gayest city in Europe. He must go back some time, take Cynthia there again—and the children; perhaps next winter they might all go! . . . How Cynthia had loved the winter they spent there the first year of their married life; the opera, the Court balls, the brilliant uniforms, the gaiety and scandals, and the

'Sacher-torte' at 'Demels.'" He smiled to himself under his semi-military, semi-walrus moustache. "Yes, Cynthia had enjoyed all, even to the Sacher-torte and the whipped cream on her morning chocolate. How they had laughed together when she had stuffed cushions under her dress and pretended the cream and cakes had made her as fat as the kind, greedy Fraü von Hauptmann, Edgar's eldest aunt! Tante Adel!" When he wanted to tease Wendy he would indicate a miniature of "Tante Adel," and assure his daughter that over-indulgence in cake and chocolate pudding would inevitably swell her to an exact replica of her almost legendary Austrian aunt. Wendy was too young to remember Tante Adel's visit to them in London (why, even Zina and John had still been almost babies then—the year of King Edward's coronation!). Liebe Tante Adel! How cold she had found the house, and exasperated Cynthia by repeatedly going up to the nurseries and shutting all the windows. "Ach die armen kinder," she had said . . . and Nannie had threatened to leave if the immense foreign aunt, bedizened with jet-black lace on her beautiful white hair, were not forbidden to intercept the nurseries' supply of fresh air. *That* had shaken the household—even in those early days . . . the possibility of 'Nannie leaving'—A saint and a tyrant—Nannie! Often Edgar Renner wondered with whimsical admiration whether he or Nannie were "master" in his house. ". . . Cynthia, of course, was different. Cynthia didn't so much 'rule' as preside, and illumine."

There followed thoughts of Cynthia, and a look of intense happiness touched his features, smoothing his thoughtful, heavy brow, making him smile again under his moustache —and raise his eyebrows in a quaint gesture of amusement. "How different his life might have been without her. A diffident young foreigner working alone in London; ambitious—an idealist; perfectly conscious of his own brains and powers, yet desperately sensitive; shy and humorous and almost painfully aware of beauty, with a corresponding horror of mediocrity and ugliness; employed (by his own choice, for his family had an army of prosperous business openings for him) in the lower ranks of an English publishing firm. He had had, as a boy, a

passionate admiration for the English—their books, their laws, their history and customs. Occasionally he had met them in Vienna—fine, easy men and women. An English countess had once visited his mother, and coming in from school he had caught a glimpse of her. He still remembered how fresh and gracious she had been, like Cynthia rather, bright brown hair and blue eyes and ready laughter. Yes, what would life have been without her?" He opened his eyes and looked across the lawn toward the house, vaguely expecting her. . . . Ach—what a woman! *What* happiness they had! And the tears glistened shamelessly in his brown eyes. "Süsses Kind," he murmured, and was still thinking of his wife . . . Cynthia, so dear and precious that he could adore, even when he condemned or resented, her inconsistencies; her sweet arrogance, her rare, rather cherished little preferences and snobbisms, her obvious favoritism of her son, her occasional malicious misuse of her wit; sudden wayward impulses to hurt or contradict, which overrode her love for him and the children, and her high sense of responsibility toward those she loved.

His sensation of immense gratitude extended like a mellow flood of light over the whole horizon of his life. There was "Zina" (Rosina she had been christened, after his mother) —his eldest daughter; Zina and the quiet, brilliant young man she was going to marry in the autumn. Zina and Colin —surely the gods would be good to them! And Edgar sighed and smiled gently, for in his deep, erratic, sentimental soul he loved all people who were in love, and believed half the ugliness of civilisation to be due to distortion or frustration of love between men and women. And John, with his splendid looks and adequate brains and prejudices, taking his first year at Oxford in his careless stride. And Wendy, who was born the winter that "Peter Pan" was first produced, and named accordingly, though he had protested to Cynthia that Wendy Renner was a quaint juxtaposition. (To which Cynthia had replied that he was by this time sufficiently English, having appeared in the New Year's Honours List, and being naturalised and married to her intensely English self, to call his daughter, if he liked, "Britannia Renner.") She had proceeded to

deride and caress him for being an English baronet; "a disguise," as she laughingly termed it, which she herself had secured for him by a considerable expenditure of wit and charm on a susceptible Cabinet Minister at a dull dinner. She was wont to ascribe the defeat of this particular Minister and his party in 1906 to the way in which he had so openly rewarded her "delightfulness" by this sudden "uplift" of her husband. Edgar, amused at the episode, had patted her hand, kissed it gently and promised to aspire to the English throne should she desire such lustre.

He saw her now, in the distance, come out of the house, hesitate, put up her parasol and then come towards him with the light, assured walk that wasn't the least of her distinctions. George Tarrant, whose art and profit had been for forty years to paint the beautiful women of Europe and America, had said to Edgar of his wife that "she always walks as if she were advancing between ranks of admiring populace"—a comment which seemed to Edgar deliciously apt as she approached him across the quiet lawns.

She supposed him from his attitude to be asleep, and decided at a distance to take the chair beside him, which was just in the shade of the beech trees, and wait until he should wake. She had a new library book under her arm and didn't expect to be bored; she had met the young man who wrote it, and found him passably entertaining—and had hoped aloud to him, when he took his leave, that his writing was half as amusing as his talk, "which, of course," she had added, "is a sadly rare combination of virtues!"

Edgar, however, got up at her nearer approach—one of his persistent, small courtesies which she loved in him, though she would laugh at him sometimes as "my little husband with the great grand manner." (He wasn't except in her mockeries, any shorter than she—though his solid build gave her the air, in comparison, of a rarer, taller being.)

"Why, Hans—I thought you were still sunk in slumber!" She always called him Hans, liking, as she said, to imply a fairy tale accompaniment to his Teutonism.

He welcomed her with his benevolent, searching gaze.

"And you would have let the sleeping dog lie! Hein? Sit down, my darling." He drew forward a chair. He

had, in his pronunciation of words and construction of sentences, scarcely an accent, but his "foreignness" flickered occasionally to the surface in little exclamations, or, when he was emotionally stirred, in sudden lapses of grammar, terms of endearment and—these were mostly provoked by stupidity—exclamations of rage and astonishment.

She stood still, rejecting the chair with a look of being provoked, yet taking the provocation with insouciance.

"Hans—what is the use of your dragging my chair right into the sun when you *know* that I prefer to sit in the shade?"

He carried the chair back into the shade and then looked over his shoulder and laughed at her—a husky, slow, genial sound—affection and merriment in his look.

"Come along then, and sit here. . . . Das Kind has a fit of 'grande dame' this afternoon——"

She allowed him to settle her in her chair and arrange the cushions at her back. He patted her gracious shoulders and then stepped back and looked at her. Her blue eyes, suddenly brilliant, met his, and she laughed, jerking up her chin, so that the pearls at her throat changed their gleam. Framed by the enamel blue of the cushions, her fresh, delicate complexion, which seemed to have acquired only an added softness with her forty-three years, her fine, irregular features, the powdering of white in her thick, beautiful brown hair, made her appear the incarnation of a mid-eighteenth century miniature. (It had also been George Tarrant who said to her, at the second sitting for her portrait, in a cool, absent tone: "Of course, your finish and texture are so good, Cynthia." "Exactly," she had retorted, "what I say to my favourite haberdasher!")

She laid her hand on his arm. "Seriously, I want to talk —before I'm any older."

He looked down at the small white fingers and the small, rosy, regularly-pointed nails to which, among her lesser and greater personal responsibilities, she attended so beautifully.

"Talk then, my darling; scatter your pearls."

She gave him a sidelong smile and then proceeded to her subject in her manner of tranquil certainty.

"The progeny," she alluded. "I'm not perfectly satisfied."

"About what? Their health?"

"Oh, no! Their health——" her own glowing looks indicated how perfectly she had been responsible for that, "their health's marvellous and their brains are well enough. John's lazy in using his . . . but that'll come. And Wendy's are still rather hidden in her stomach. No—it isn't——" She ruminated, contracting her fine eyebrows, "It's their general attitude to life; they," she broke off and looked gravely at her husband. "Hans—they expect too much, and that makes me afraid for them."

He nodded, taking in her implications and seeing even more profoundly than she the wisdom of her contention.

"That is right for youth though," he said at last. "It is very right and splendid that they should be proud towards life, and expect much——"

"But they'll be disappointed, Hans!"

"That will only make character."

"It makes me afraid all the same."

He held her hand more firmly in his big grasp.

"That is how parents must feel, Liebchen, always a little afraid and wanting to protect their children from Fate; that is one of the penalties of our happiness."

"Always payments," she murmured, and added with a little fierce, impatient gesture: "If only *they* didn't have to pay!"

"Ach—my dearest! Have you been thinking these things all the afternoon?"

"It's been worrying me lately altogether. It seems to me a sort of defiance of Fate, that we should all be so assured. You and I—we've had our bad times anyway" —she paused—remembering the enraptured, frenzying years of their early married life (when her people had refused to see her because she had run away and married "a foreigner whom we know nothing about," and their social life was circumscribed by an inadequate income), "we can rest," she pursued, "and feel somehow that we've earned our assurance and happiness. But Zina and Colin —John—even Wendy," she checked herself. "Perhaps I exaggerate the possibilities of disappointment rather——"

"These things make the human soul."

"But they can spoil it too—if they don't make them properly—John——" she added under her breath.

Edgar looked gently at her.

"You love him most—and so you fear most for him. It is strange that you should feel these fears just now——"

"You mean just because it's so lovely down here this summer." Her vision embraced the lawns and trees and distant gardens; the perfect Queen Anne house, with creepers climbing up between the tall, gracious windows, half-obscuring the mellowed rosy brick. "Just because of all this perfection, and you mustn't think I'm not simply loving it, I've had this feeling that one ought to be—prepared."

"Prepare *them?*"

"Well—somehow try and make them have a philosophy—realise there might be difficulties—that they can't just bask in the sun and enjoy themselves."

"But when they only see beauty and happiness? Isn't that what we have always wanted to give them?"

She agreed. "We've succeeded—as in many things." She laughed. "Oh, Hans—how solemn I've made you!"

He met her sudden radiance thoughtfully, pursuing their subject.

"How could we have *taught* them—misfortune? There is already enough—and, as you say, they will have to find it! but surely 'later than sooner' is best?"

"But, then, it isn't that one wants to *give* them unhappiness—as to teach them to *deal* with it."

"But there is no 'technique' in such things; they come and our characters 'deal' with them."

She seized the word "character." "I wonder how much they have stowed away untried! Zina," she reflected, "Zina's nineteen and she's never had any experience apart from dances and parties and intellectual things, except to fall in love with Colin."

"That widens the vision——"

"I wonder—when it's all so beautifully easy for them; they *are* darlings!"

Edgar pronounced, from the recesses of his judgment, "Colin has understanding—a mind—he is deeper than Zina and John——"

"He's older——"

"Only twenty-two. But he feels little things very deeply—and he suffers I believe in the discomforts of others. He is hurt through others even though his own lot is on such fair ground——"

"He's very brilliant, he ought to go far."

Edgar shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"He chooses politics, but the ugliness, the laziness and selfishness and stupidity may baulk him, embitter him."

"But he's so magnificently full of hope and belief—in the human race; that may carry him through."

"Yes—he believes that all things are possible; he is full of beliefs."

"All that in him only confirms Zina's perfect security."

"They love each other very much, those two, that is the greatest defence for them."

"Each other? I suppose so." Cynthia absently took her knitting out of a bag she had brought with her; she was making some shooting stockings for John.

"I wish John weren't so extravagant about his clothes."

Edgar watched her with a benign, almost wistful, indulgence; this was so characteristic of her, to touch, even with deep and extraordinary wisdom, on some vital subject, to attack a problem, realising the need of some solution, to feel this need and confide in him, and then let the subject slip like a handful of sand between her sophisticated white fingers. He replied to her latter remark, knowing how completely and carelessly she had now abandoned the former subject.

"He's at the 'Brummel' age."

"But, Hans, it's dreadful how much he spends on ties and waistcoats; it was bad enough at Eton!"

"But, Cyntia" (he had never mastered the "th" of her name). "But, Cyntia, consider what you yourself spend on trifles!" He glanced down at her grey buckled shoes and silk stockings.

"Hans—I resent your being so outrageously reasonable——" She rather liked to complain of John's extravagance, which seemed to her privately (and, she knew, absurdly) to be one of his many magnificent boyish qualities.

"John has no need of such things!" She looked down at her knitting—inwardly amused at conjectures as to John's own comments on her conversation. "But, of course, if *you* don't mind——"

"As a matter of fact I have spoken to him about it —yesterday."

She looked up quickly.

"Oh, Hans, why?"

His laughter benignly greeted her defensive query.

"Liebchen, you are always altogether ridiculous."

She attended to her knitting again, her head bent consideringly to one side.

"That," she said in her clear, quiet tones, "that for twenty-one years of faithful service!" And when she glanced up again to laugh at him she perceived that her ridiculous, sentimental, Teutonic husband was looking at her with tears in his eyes.

"——But why, Hans, darling?"

"Because I am happy. You will never make an Englishman of me, Cyntia. . . ."

She smiled and looked at her wrist watch.

"Now, my dear, will you go in and tell Frances that we'll have tea brought out here at half-past four—and that Wendy is having tea with us to-day, so there is to be plenty of plain bread and butter as well as the usual sandwiches. I told Nannie she could go to the flower show at the Vicarage from half-past four till six."

Edgar got up and yawned—waving his fly-whisk in his right hand.

"'Madame' shall be obeyed." He made her a mock bow and departed toward the house. He held himself well, and his look of a general in mufti was only belied by his leisurely pace and the dreamy expression of his somewhat military features.

II

"Are you sorry, Colin"—Zina was leaning over the edge of the moored punt and trailing her hand in the water—"that Oxford's over for you?" She looked down into the water with an expectant expression, as if she awaited an answer rather from the depths of the quiet river

than from the creature, supine among cushions and a litter of books and papers, at the other end of the punt.

Colin raised himself on his elbow and bent his sensitive, eager look on the girl; her profile was almost hidden from him by a wave of hair, which had slipped, as she leant over the water, from the discipline of hairpins to which her thick locks (ruddier and more rebellious than her mother's) had uneasily accustomed themselves in the last year.

His consideration was more for the glow of the sunshine on her hair than for an adjudged answer to her question; his vivid look was at variance with his lazy answer.

"In some ways, darling."

Still she looked into the river. "What ways?" she persisted, and drew her hand from the water and let the drops fall from her sun-browned fingers.

He parried idly, watching her outstretched arm. "The passing of youth, the days that 'have been,' the inevitableness of responsibility." His tone was inconsequent, but the phrases, tossed off so easily at this moment, to sink among the green shadows and silver lights of the river, were the froth of a certain turmoil of thought that he had lately stirred up in his own consciousness. She didn't answer, and he added a further phrase of explanation more obviously tinged with the seriousness of its origins.

"The acceptance of 'real life,' darling."

Now she turned her delicately glowing face toward him, pushing back her hair from her forehead with a childish gesture, meeting his look with confidence.

"But isn't that just exactly and absolutely what we *want*, Colin?"

He smiled, a soft, swift smile, without taking his eyes off her face; then he said, still lounging on one elbow, reverting thoughtfully to her original question: "You see, Oxford has been three years of a quite special—and essentially unrepeatable, world! A peculiar little cosmos—bounded by Time rather than Space, (because I mean, one is, even *not* in term time, sort of 'living Oxford' in those three years)—and with an entirely different 'convention of life' to normal existence. I believe in those three years one

comes nearer to being the contradiction of Rousseau's little remark about man being free yet everywhere in chains —than at any other period in one's existence."

"But the endless rules and regulations?"

Colin shook his head—"Almost all negligible. . . ." He pursued his reflections. "It's bad, in a way, that sort of temporary artificial irresponsibility—freedom; unlimited freedom to read and wander and think one's own thoughts and see one's own friends; practically no obligatory relations with anyone; time to see innumerable people you *do* like—and the facilities absolutely to ignore anyone you *don't.*" His tones grew quieter. "And the sheer spoiling loveliness of the place itself; those lovely green summers (I think the river's even better there than it is here—more intimate and belonging to oneself!)—and the misty blue enchanted evenings in the winter. Sometimes one didn't know, realise properly, quite *how* beautiful and transitory it all was! Wet nights—with those great dark buildings looming up like shadows—and the lights blurred and golden in the rain, and reflected in the High, in the wet pavements, rather like a dark river at night. . . ." He paused, and the past, which was still such a little time away, yet so absolutely cut off and gone, seemed to echo for him strangely, like dim, sweet chimes, in the brilliant afternoon. He wasn't, he hoped and believed, unusually sentimental, and took life in generally quick, exhilarating gasps, feeling the goodness and sting of it in his veins, attacking the ascent of years which seemed to rise so beautifully, and magnificently before him, with a hopefulness which had, as yet, no need of courage. He saw it all before him, when he wasn't enthralled by the richness and mystery of the immediate, as a brilliant highway; he had a young keen sense of the present and a splendid subconsciousness of the future as an adventure involving much fine giving and taking. It was seldom, especially since his progress only measured twenty-two years, that he considered the past—or anyway did more than glance gaily over his shoulder at a childhood and adolescence which seemed only a naturally lovely outset, and it was strange to him that the passing of his Oxford life should have touched him, even though the present was so indescribably good, with a sense of loss—

as though a precious thing had dropped from his grasp into a fathomless sea.

Zina murmured, wondering at the look which touched his young, sensitive features like a shadow of an infinitely remote unhappiness.

"I didn't know you cared so much."

"Nor did I, really——"

She hesitated, and though she knew how absolutely she was real and beautiful to him, she could feel and quickly despise herself for a prick of jealousy.

"Do you wish you were back?" She couldn't restrain herself from asking—and he, with his swift perceptiveness and as swift and clear compassion, felt the implications of her question, and came across and sat beside her and put his arm round her shoulders.

"Sweetheart—*why* should you take it like that?"

She shook her head and looked up at him with glistening brown eyes.

"You know, darling," he pursued—and his vivid look was so near hers that she could see how the green and brown specks alternated in the irises of his eyes—you *know* that everything lovely that I've seen and felt since we've loved each other has only been *more* so—more terribly lovely—*because* of you——" He kissed her forehead gently, as though she were asleep. "Darling angel, you *must* understand! You didn't really think just now that I wanted to go *back?*—to be further back from our belonging to each other—from our being together for ever and ever? Darling"—the murmur of his words was near and strange, like sounds in a dream—his tones seemed to fall on her senses like the petals from a flower. She stirred against his shoulder and half-smiled, her eyelids closed.

"I suppose I didn't really think so," she whispered. "——I think I really believe in you too much for that."

He went on, desperately anxious that she shouldn't for a second misunderstand—and be hurt by her misunderstanding—"Zina, darling, when I looked back just now—to those three years, and some of their loveliness, it wasn't anything so—so explicable as 'wanting to be back'—(I don't, a bit, you know)—— It was just retrospectively"—for a moment he hesitated and bent his head,

and laid his cheek against hers—"it was just feeling that time, altogether, as having been exquisite. I simply had a very acute feeling of how rare it had been; and when I say I 'cared' it was for this quality of beautiful days there, and it made me feel vaguely sad, as—as beautiful things do. As you do," he added in a slow, sweet tone—"as you do when you're most lovely."

She opened her eyes and half-smiled.

"Darling!" She couldn't, and didn't even feel she needed to explain to him, how absolutely she loved him; merely knew with him a shimmering atmosphere of happiness. She lay still, her head against his shoulder, and was conscious of the slow lapping of water between the boat and the bank of the river and the glinting of the sun through the leaves of the willow branches over their heads, and the far cooing of pigeons in the copse which hid the house from their view. She took the whole loveliness of their conditions with assurance. She felt it simply as the fundamental rhythm of existence that they should meet and love one another, and henceforth spend the whole of their life together; and when she wondered, it wasn't at the perfect fact of their relation, but at unknown exquisite complexities of feeling which she came upon within that relation—like strange blossoms in a garden. There was some sense of this in her mind when she said at last:

"I wonder how much we've changed each other, Colin? I—I scarcely feel the same person as I did a year ago, before we knew each other. One seems to 'come upon' such a lot somehow. It's difficult to explain."

"Funny," he said, "how much we think alike. I've just been thinking of the immense difference you've made. In some ways you've resolved a whole set of feelings that simply ran wild, frenzied me because I couldn't deal with them; those sort of maddened, inexplicable feelings that made one want to get a grasp of the meaning of emotion, and yet left one floundering in a lot of sensations and desires and æsthetic appreciations. And in other ways—loving you so much has opened up whole vistas of understanding." He added whimsically: "What a queer, unaccountable business!"

"What?"

"Being in love——"

Tranquilly she shook her head. "No, darling, it isn't." Her clear, absolute view produced in him a sense of humility, and at the same time an awareness of how much wider even his young vision was than hers (for he was himself only too conscious of how youthfully he faced actuality). His sureness came from his sense that, in spite of ugliness and wrongness, one could make unerringly for fineness and splendour, while, partly because she was younger than he, partly because a certain egotism made her reactions to remote shadows and discords less sensitive than his, her security wasn't "in spite of" anything but was natural as the unconscious egotism to which its quality was due. She was incapable, since her own life had been so musical, of conceiving the possibilities of disharmony; her imagination didn't so much turn from the unsatisfactory as follow an impulse to explore only the variations of the beautiful, which were, to her eagerness, so rewarding—in art, in books, in music, in human relations. She hadn't yet ever paused to realise how one-directioned these excursions were, or perceived that the sureness that kept her so "happy" lay like a gentle mist between her understanding and realms of the "unexplored."

As far as Colin was aware of this bias in her he knew it as a kind of rareness, felt her aloofness from the unlovely as identifying her for him more completely with all that was good. When she had once urged, proffering a casual self-revelation that she could well afford, that he put too fine an interpretation on her qualities, he had merely looked at her for a long, still moment and then kissed her suddenly and intensely.

He broke their silence now.

"What are you thinking of, Zina?"

"Nothing particularly, except of the heavenliness of our being together."

"Are you perfectly, utterly happy?" he whispered, and she repeated drowsily:

"Utterly happy."

He took up her left hand and raised it to his lips. "You darling! It's queer how, in some ways, we're affected quite differently by each other."

"You eternal analyst," she murmured smiling; but he insisted, bending his head so that her hair touched his cheek and he could breathe her fragrant nearness. "It *is* different though, sweetheart; you're just peaceful and utterly happy, because you love me; but I can't quite take it like that. Sometimes I love you so much that it's almost beyond being just 'happiness'—it's a kind of strange fear and pain and amazement, a kind of force that takes hold of me and makes me so magnificently grateful that I'm almost afraid."

She whispered, "Of what, darling?" and was curiously stirred by a sense that he knew some inexplicable reality of the emotions which she hadn't ever felt, even though she so absolutely loved him.

"Afraid of something. I don't know exactly, some other "force." I suppose it's absurd, afraid because you're so beautiful and so precious to me."

They heard and listened like creatures between two worlds to the stable clock in the distance, from the direction of the house, striking four.

Zina sighed, half tragically, half in mockery, opening her eyes and meeting his near gaze with a soft, deep look.

"Colin, we must think about getting back, you know Mummie hates our being late and untidy for tea."

He smiled. "Sweet, absurd child!" considering her deliciously infantile in her strict observance of a mealtime discipline that had been inculcated by great "Nannie"; and as she sat up with a straightening of her shoulders and toss of her head, he added:

"Now kiss me once more."

And she turned, with a murmur of laughter, and flung her arms round his neck.

III

John spent the afternoon cleaning his golf clubs. He was going at the end of the month to stay with a friend from "the House" whose people had a villa at Dinard: probably they would play at St. Briac; he had heard one couldn't be sure of getting a court for tennis more than two hours a day. He hadn't used his clubs since he played

in the Spring term at Oxford, and they were disgracefully rusty.

Wendy, setting out with Nannie toward the orchard, where she had been engaged lately in building a secret "tree-house" in a low, accommodating apple tree, caught sight of her brother in the yard outside the garage.

"O-o-o—John!" she called.

He looked up. "Hullo, Funny!" and laughed, crinkling up the corners of his blue eyes as Wendy precipitated herself towards him.

"Round people shouldn't run or they burst!" he cautioned. "Should they, Nannie?" he added, as Nannie, with her almost traditional summer panoply of camp stool, knitting and a copy of the Church Magazine, sedately followed Wendy's onslaught.

Nannie gave the little, soft, encouraging smile that always seemed to linger in her eyes, ready to flicker for a gayer moment on her lips in response to some sally of "the children's" or to some especial delight, such as a fine hollyhock bloom (she was devoted to flowers) or the arrival of a letter from one of her numerous relations. She protested, though in her gentle voice which held, without being accented, a hint of West Country inflections (a voice which Zina had once remarked was "like honey and bread and butter").

"Now, John—don't you be always teasing Wendy about her being fat; you were as fat yourself once."

"There!" scored Wendy, prancing round her brother, her ten years' old energies undaunted by the warmth of the afternoon. John darted out a hand and prodded her just below the smocking of her bright blue overall.

"Stick your tummy in and then you wouldn't *look* such a stout party!"

Wendy doubled up, squeaking with amusement, crinkling up her blue eyes in John's manner.

"Oh, you old pig, John—Pig!" she repeated hilariously, backing from the range of his arm. Nannie said something about not calling her brother names which Wendy ignored, repeating "Pig! Pig! Pig!" under her breath and dancing up and down as though this repeated exclamation constituted a peculiarly invigorating tune. Wendy was

less amenable to Nannie's ideas of right and wrong than Zina and John had ever been, was, in fact, the member of the family, not excluding Edgar and Cynthia, least subject to her influence. It was at Nannie's command that Zina had thrown away an experimental lipstick; that John had promised not to smoke more than ten cigarettes a day; it was on her advice that Zina had never been sent to boarding school, but brought up in the country with a succession of French and German governesses and her father's library to contribute to her education, and John had been allowed a glass of port after dinner ever since he was fifteen, so that he shouldn't "get an idea there was anything grand in drink—which is what makes half of them take to drunkenness later on!" Partly, perhaps, because Nannie was already over forty when Wendy was born and therefore more lenient than she had been in the early nursery days of Zina and John in the preceding ten years, partly, perhaps, because Wendy was of a generation which knew not Victoria and scarcely noticed Edward VII (and may have already been disgruntled by the supposedly iconoclastic "Zeitgeist of the Twentieth Century Georgians") —in whatever proportions these causes may have combined, Wendy was, in fact, inclined to disobedience. Zina said she was "spoilt"; John found her insubordination entertaining though some "sailor-collar" remnant in his ideas also caused him to remember his own and Zina's earliest years and rather to wonder at Wendy's irreverences. Edgar teased her, laughed at her, occasionally tried to reason with her, when she would blandly excuse herself with such expressions as "Well, if I'm not naughty I shouldn't ever be able to repent" or some such incontrovertible truth as "Everyone is wicked sometimes." "You don't always *see* a thing is naughty until afterwards—and anyway sometimes it's worth being punished for."

On this particular day Wendy's conduct had been exemplary. She hadn't built tents with the bedclothes while she was resting, or tried to smuggle a book to the lavatory after breakfast (she was reading a book of John's called "The Settler and the Savage," which she liked better than one she had recently attempted and abandoned called "The Visits of Elizabeth"—which she had found in one of

the spare bedrooms and which seemed to have no sense in it) she had eaten up all her "greens" at dinner and hadn't put out her tongue at the boot-boy when she and Nannie had passed him just now by the back door. Consequently, although this excellent demeanour was influenced by the decree issued by Nannie at breakfast, that if she was naughty she wouldn't have "tea downstairs," but go to bed while Nannie was at the Flower Show, Wendy was anxious to plan a small extra reward for her own virtue; John's golf clubs seemed to suggest satisfaction. She stopped prancing and strode up to him and thoughtfully stroked the top of his mashie with her forefinger; she put her head on one side and glanced first at Nannie and then at her brother.

"I wonder if I could help you clean your clubs?" she suggested.

"I wonder," said John in a voice she found very irritating; he looked at Nannie.

Nannie hesitated. "You've just got that clean smock on."

Wendy, detecting a hesitation which might lead to assent, broke in breathlessly:

"Oh, but I can *easily* fetch my overall—there's one downstairs hanging up with the mackintoshes." She saw Nannie relent, and seized John's arm and rubbed her forehead ingratiatingly against the sleeve of his blazer. "And John would fetch it, wouldn't you, John, darlingest?"

"All right," he chuckled. "May she, Nan?"

Nannie nodded and hitched her camp-stool more securely under her arm.

"Very well," she assented. "But do mind she doesn't get that emery paper all over her face and neck; she gets in such a mess, and I don't want to have to give her a bath before I go out, and if she bothers you, John, and doesn't behave, bring her to me down yonder in the orchard. I'll wait here while you get her pinny."

John put down the golf bag and made off, at his swinging stride, into the house by the back door. Nannie called after him that he had better get himself a hat at the same time, and he nodded and disappeared.

In the interval Nannie encamped herself on the appropriate stool and Wendy fingered each of the golf clubs in turn. Nannie took up her knitting.

"I wish *I* were going to the Flower Show," Wendy remarked.

"Well, you could have come if you'd wanted," Nannie rejoined reasonably. "Mummie offered to take you when she went herself yesterday to open it, and you were rude and said you wanted to play in the orchard."

"I didn't want to go *yesterday*," Wendy said in a tone she considered to be even more reasonable than Nannie's. "Last summer I went with Mummie to the opening and I had a petticoat that was all starched and scratched me at the back of my arms, and you made me put on socks, and people said, "So this is Lady Renner's youngest daughter!"

Wendy, in a high, insipid voice, did a passable imitation of the Vicar's sister.

"You shouldn't make fun of Miss Grimmer."

"Daddy does."

Nannie stressed a shade of conduct.

"In quite a different way."

Wendy fidgeted with the head of the niblick.

"It would be very dull if everyone made fun in the same way," she commented.

Nannie privately reflected that Wendy often hit the truth; also that certainly Miss Grimmer, who ran the concerns of her brother and of as many parishoners as she could hypnotise by an eye whose chilly gleam was not at all mitigated by a pair of pince-nez, was a person who rather provoked the making of fun (that is, if one was not, as Nannie knew the kitchenmaid and the doctor's wife and several others to be, under that lady's precise and forceful influence). But Wendy's next remark necessitated reproof.

"I hate Miss Grimmer."

Nannie ceased knitting, and her tranquil look was bent on Wendy in reproach.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour," she quoted. "You remember?"

"Yes, but I *do* hate Miss Grimmer, Nannie—often."

"But you must try not to—and it's foolish for you to say you hate Miss Grimmer, for you don't see her except in Church on Sundays—and then only mostly in summer while we're down in these parts."

"Well, I hate her in Church on Sundays!"

"Well, you'd be better not to be in Church then—than to stand in the Lord's house and think bad thoughts."

"Well, I believe Miss Grimmer does too! I believe she covets Mummie's new hat with the—the 'curmelias on—she looked at it last Sunday all the time while Mr. Grimmer was in the pulpit."

"Well *you* should have been attending to the sermon."

"But that won't stop Miss Grimmer coveting Mummie's hat," said Wendy quickly.

Nannie didn't save herself from having, to Wendy's restless judgment, made a weak defence by adding, as she resumed her knitting:

"Well, it isn't for you to judge Miss Grimmer—or to hate her."

After a pause Wendy said reflectively:

"I think I hate her 'cos she smells stuffy."

Nannie was relieved at John's reappearance. Somehow her arguments with Zina and John had never been like this.

"Sorry I've been so long, Nan, but I couldn't find the pinafore downstairs, and I had to go right up to the nursery for it!"

"Well, I'm glad you've your hat," smiled Nannie, and got up and once more took up her camp-stool. "Now I shall go down to the orchard."

"All right, Nannie darling, and if I don't behave Wendy'll bring me to you to be spanked!"

Nannie looked affectionately at him; she believed him the handsomest, gayest, and strongest of young men, a belief his six foot, good looks and airy manner to some extent justified; and she cherished a secret pride that he was already at "the Oxford College," though only eighteen, since his cousin Cyril, whom everyone spoke of as being so "clever" (just as if John couldn't be clever when he wanted to be), had only gone to Oxford when he was nearly twenty.

Nannie turned away, and then added, glancing over her

shoulder at the pair of them, "By the way, John, I sent back those new shirts you ordered to Hoskyns; you don't need any more."

He looked momentarily disconcerted and then acquiesced "Very well, Nannie." She nodded briskly and departed, and John watched her competent, white-clad figure (she had always worn white piqué skirts in summer and grey flannel skirts in winter) depart across the yard and through the kitchen garden beyond, in the direction of the orchard. Then he bent down, still slightly disconcerted, and began to fasten Wendy's pinafore.

"Why did Nannie send back your shirts?" she enquired.

"Goodness knows," muttered John. "Stand still, or I can't fasten this." Wendy obeyed without comment. She didn't want to make John cross or he might decide not to let her clean his clubs with him after all. If he was annoyed he *was* sometimes rather sudden.

"*There*, Sausage! Now let's begin." He gave her a piece of emery paper and they sat down side by side on the low cement wall which surrounded two sides of the garage yard. "Here, you can start on the iron."

For some time they "emeried" in silence. Then, when Wendy perceived that John's normal air of cheerfulness had returned, she asked:

"Where's Zina?"

"On the river with Colin."

Wendy wished *she* were on the river.

"What are they doing?"

"Oh, just nothing, I expect."

"I see. Why?"

"I don't know."

"Are you glad Zina is getting married to Colin?"

John nodded. "Yes, I like him awfully."

This was true, though he considered that Colin's conversations with Zina sometimes rose to a rather high and absurdly complicated level, and that they seemed to spend overmuch time discussing such matters as art and politics, though these were interesting enough if you took them ordinarily and not in such an involved way! John sometimes wondered though whether they ever thought of kissing each other, or whether it was all talk and "soul

affinities?" He had even confided to his mother that you would think from the way Zina and Colin talked about the future that it was going to be all politics and intellect and no babies; Cynthia had rejoined that it was anyway unlikely that they would discuss their possible children in general conversation—wasn't it? An answer with which John, a stickler for all conversational conventions, had perforce to agree.

"I *like* Colin," pronounced Wendy. "He carved me a little wood dip—diplodicus to float in my bath!"

"Good for him!"

"He tried to write me a poem about a diplodicus, but then he said the rhymes were too difficult and the only one he could think of was naughty. He wrote it though and gave it to Zina and wouldn't show me." Wendy paused, and as John only grunted she continued—"But I took it out of Zina's stocking drawer where I saw her put it"—Wendy bent and undid the strap of her square, brown shoe and extracted a piece of paper from under her bare heel. "Look." She handed the paper to John, who tried to look disapproving. He read, on a sheet of notepaper, headed "Pelham Court, Berks":—

I cherish the Diplodicus,
Although he is a bloody "cus,"
For prehistoric beasts are rare
In our degenerate English air.
And it is very hard to get
A real neolithic pet,
And paleolithic Pekinese
Waste here from some obscure disease,
And even Arctic wolves expire
If you should dare to light a fire.
And Dinosauri always die
In tepid climes—so that is why
I cherish my Diplodicus,
Although he is a bloody "cus."

"I tried to read it," said Wendy, "but I thought it was rather silly."

John chuckled. "It is, Sausage, not worth thinking about!" John's secondary thoughts were that he was

rather glad Colin had written that sort of rot for Zina, it might have been so much worse.

"What's 'tepid climes?'"

"Oh—England, he means."

"Why doesn't he *say* England?"

John put back a shining niblick and took another club.

"Poetic licence," he explained absently.

"Licence?"

"Yes."

Wendy reflected. "Like a dog licence do you mean?"

"You are a fat goose! Not a bit!"

"Well then, what?"

"What *what?*" John paused and lit a cigarette and threw away the match into the bushes behind the wall.

"What sort of licence then?" exclaimed Wendy, irritated.

"Oh it's quite different from a dog licence *or* a gun-licence *or* a marriage licence," was all the explanation he gave her.

Her next question demanded a concise answer.

"D'you have licences because things are dangerous?"

John laughed. "D'you mean dogs and guns—and marriages? You are a comic, Wendy!"

She paused thoughtfully, ignoring his facetiousness, which seemed to her misplaced; she would get at the truth another way.

"Is poetry dangerous?"

John had to admit that, strictly speaking, it wasn't.

Wendy determined to refer the question to her father at teatime. She drew the sleeve of John's blazer back from his wrist and looked at his watch. Not teatime yet. She wondered whether mummie would, perhaps, let her not begin with bread and butter; but Zina always wanted Mummie to be strict. Wendy thought it was a good thing that Zina would go away in the autumn and get married. She liked Zina, but not always. She liked John best, and then Daddy and Nannie, and then Mummie and Colin and Zina all about the same. She glanced sideways at her brother's profile bent over an obstinate patch of rust, and considered him with a sensation of shy admiration. Sometimes she was overcome like this, by this feeling that

John was very, very splendid, and Nannie knew that whomever else either deliberately or forgetfully Wendy omitted from her prayers she never neglected to demand that the Almighty should bless her brother. Last summer she had gone to Lords, and John, in a most splendid waistcoat and top hat and a pale blue rosette in his buttonhole, had walked about with her and given her ices and introduced her to his friends as "My younger sister"; and Wendy remembered that he had never once called her "Sausage" that afternoon or said anything at all about "retreating the waist."

IV

The sudden flocking to tea of a family which had for Cynthia been as absent as swallows in November since luncheon caused her, as they settled about the table, adjusting their deck chairs and murmuring about "thirst" and "in the sun" and "in the shade," to cite one of her favourite aphorisms: "Les parents sonts les gens qu'on ne frequente pas entre les repas." She could pronounce it with a contented little laugh, half her attention on cups and teapot and the possible necessity of more milk, for she had never as a parent felt herself slighted, and was aware that she held as much "position" in her family as in a larger society; and though she took tribute as her right, she was proud of the rarer distinction, was, in fact, humbly triumphant that her children should appreciate as well as love her.

Zina helped herself to a sandwich.

"I should have thought you'd have been tired of being 'frequented,' Mummie, after this morning!" Zina and her mother had spent serious hours in the boudoir making a list of trousseau.

"Well, I'm relieved anyway that we've done it. Colin, no milk for you, isn't it?"

"Thanks." Colin took the proffered cup and put it on the grass; he had seated himself cross-legged on a cushion at Zina's feet.

On the other side of the table John was explaining to his father the superiority of a "wire fly-whisk" over "the horsehair sort."

"Well, perhaps," Edgar shook his head and restrained a smile at his son's tone of impassioned conviction. Zina interrupted, supposing that their father "had to live up to" the Max cartoon. (This hung in the library, and depicted Edgar, in his usual flannel suit and club tie and panama hat, flourishing his inevitable "summer-weapon": it was superscribed "The Optimist," and proceeding from his mouth were the words "What is the use of grumbling about little troubles, hein?—when they so easily can be dealt with?")

Wendy seated "up to the table" on an ordinary chair, which to her annoyance had been especially brought out for her, began to munch through the inevitable (and also "especially for her"!) bread and butter, conscious of chocolate macaroons and "jam roll" to be attained. She didn't stop to laugh even when Colin suddenly made a rabbit face at her, twitching his nose in a way she particularly liked and eating with little nibbling grimaces: she merely regarded him from under the flopping brim of her hat with mirthful blue eyes and continued to fill her mouth.

John fell to discussing his prospective visit to Dinard at the end of the month, and whether he should stay there all August or come back in time for the local cricket week, when a lot of his friends would be staying in the neighbourhood.

"I'd rather like to be back," he said—"and besides, it's Mummie's birthday on the thirtieth."

Edgar perceived that Cynthia, in the midst of a desultory talk with Colin, caught this last remark, and gave a side-long look at her son, a look which seemed to Edgar to blend a benediction and a kiss. John didn't notice; he was now putting forward the suggestion—he liked to have his future satisfactorily planned out—that when his mother and Zina went to Paris in September to finish seeing about the trousseau, he might accompany them.

"You see, I hardly know Paris at all, Father—I've only been once."

"You have a long life before you."

"Still, it's a bore to wait, even if I live to be a centenarian."

"What's that?" Wendy spared a second to enquire: she was nearly through her "second piece."

"Someone who has a hundred ears," Colin remarked gravely. "Centen-earian!"

Wendy spared another second to justify her common-sense.

"Oh, bosh, Colin!"

Zina laughed across at her small sister.

"Wise Wendy! Don't allow Colin to impose on your credulity."

Wendy thought probably Zina was teasing too, but decided not to stop and find out. She observed that both Zina and Colin were laughing, but they aften did, and when one of them laughed the other always copied. Wendy liked them better apart—they had a way, when they were together, of making her feel extremely young, or else simply wandering off and entirely forgetting her. John had explained that they "wandered off" because they were engaged, which seemed as unconvincing a reason as any other. She was glad that John *wasn't* engaged.

"What will you do in Paris?" Edgar enquired of his son. "You won't want to be always shopping with your sister."

He wondered just how ingenuously John would meet his question and fixed a humorous glance on the boy's face. John flushed, but alluded with composure to "the Louvre and Versailles—and places," and then added, meeting his father's quizzical look:

"And of course, I'd like to see some 'shows' and cabarets." He referred airily to a friend who pronounced some of these "comic places" to be quite amusing.

Edgar lit a cigar (he didn't allow himself to eat at tea-time for fear of becoming fat—a fear which Cynthia encouraged in him); he turned to his wife.

"John wants to see the 'night life of Paris,'" he said benignly, and then again fixed his inscrutable brown eyes on his son. Edgar's look was, as a rule, infinitely kind, but beyond that there was something baffling, something good but unaccountable in him which gave the impression that he understood rather more than most people consciously gave him to understand. The insincere found him,

with his unassuming presence, disconcerting; and the pretentious had with him an irksome sense of being "funny"; and malice and unkindness seemed in his presence to be only pitiful. He was, in an unusual yet perfectly unobtrusive way, truthful where most people aren't quite true, and real where many are, even very little, unreal.

John was surprised that his father added: "I don't see why he should not go, if he wants to," and even felt that this casual acquiescence in any investigation he might wish to make into "night life" blunted the devilment of such expeditions.

Cynthia nodded. "Very well, John. You go to Dinard next week, stay there for August, and join Zina and myself in September in Paris. (More tea, Colin? . . . Wendy, have some more milk!) . . . Then Hans can join us and take me to Venice——"

Edgar's tufty eyebrows jerked up.

"To Venice, my dearest?"

She reaffirmed a decision she had made during the afternoon.

"Yes, Hans, this year I think I want to go to Venice, just for the latter half of September."

"I might not be able to leave the business."

She waived that easily, knowing that it pleased him to make teasing objections and then capitulate to her whims.

"What is the use of a phalanx of 'partners' if you can't leave the firm in their grasping hands? Anyway, I'm not certain publishers aren't all a little superfluous—the bad, greedy 'middlemen' between the poor author and the poor printer, who impose so dreadfully on the poor public!"

She laughed at him, and he took her mockery with silent appreciation.

"Oh, poor father!" defended Zina.

"Venice," remarked Colin, bending a thoughtful look on Cynthia. "Surely, Lady Renner, Venice isn't going to be a very easy or safe place to achieve!"

"But why, Colin!" She was puzzled.

Edgar's tones were suddenly grave.

"I think he's right, Cynthia—you saw the papers this morning. Vienna has sent her ultimatum to Belgrade."

Even as he spoke he recollected with a sense of the lizard nature of man the sunny inconsequence of his attitude to "events," how he had drowsily planned to revisit Vienna in the autumn, with Cynthia and the children.

"But, my dear Hans"—Cynthia was charmingly reasonable. "My dear Colin, even if Austria *does* go to war with Serbia, I can't see why Hans and myself should be prevented from storing up a little sunshine and warmth before we face an English winter!" She grew more urgently reasonable, perceiving the uncommitting seriousness of her husband's look.

"After all, we shall go by the Riviera and Genoa; we needn't go near the war areas, and, anyway, we shall be sheltered by the Alps and the Adriatic."

"But," Colin persisted. "But war—even if the disturbance doesn't spread any further than Central Europe ——"

"How d'you mean, Colin?" Zina interposed. He turned quickly to her, "If it remains *only* between Austria-Hungary and Serbia——"

"If?" Cynthia took the implication, as far as she took it at all, lightly, but Edgar was looking gravely across the tea table at his future son-in-law.

Cynthia smiled. "I cannot see, anyway, how Italy or travel to Italy should be involved. All these tiresome little conflagrations! One's far too apt to make much of all these quarrels in Southern Europe. Why, it's an occupation for these peoples, like golf or football for our——"

Edgar murmured, "'Those peoples,' Cynthia?" and added, with a mild humour, "Try and speak respectfully of the Austrians!"

She leant forward, her charming countenance vivid and protesting.

"But, darling, *darling*—you know I *adore* Austria. I only don't mean to be disconcerted in our travels by the ramifications of her foreign policy; and, anyway," she pursued, sublimely and complacently inconsequent, "you've been naturalised too long to count as an Austrian any more."

John, helping himself to a second slice of cake, enquired of his father with a sense of incidental amusement:

"Supposing you hadn't been naturalised, father, should I have to serve in the Austrian army?"

Edgar nodded. "I suppose so."

John pursued his fancy. "Imagine me suddenly summoned from headquarters!" He assumed a mock-heroic tone, which Wendy found overwhelmingly funny. "Booted and spurred, a cannon flung over one shoulder."

Zina laughed. "And an aeroplane tilted becomingly over one eye."

"Oh!" choked Wendy, scarlet with laughter. "Oh, *silly* Zina!"

Cynthia protested. "Wendy, don't spill your milk—put it down—don't hold the cup in your hand like that!"

Colin took a pencil and a sheet of paper out of the pocket of his blazer.

"I'm going to do an enchanting picture of John in full uniform fighting the Servians."

"May I take your book, Lady Renner, to rest this paper on?" He began to draw, smiling to himself, his dark head bent a little to one side, his gaze narrowed.

John got up and went and joined the group looking over Colin's shoulder.

"You've made me look a sort of a hearty 'conquering curate!'"

"With top-boots and spurs." Colin's head was still bent over his drawing.

Cynthia looked from the drawing to the original and smiled softly.

"I like the laurel wreath," she said, and thought to herself how little, in a way, John had changed since he was a baby; he had looked very much the same really when he was two! The same facial resemblance to a fair, blithe cherub—only raised higher from the earth, and surmounting such very exquisite white flannels. (She conjectured incidentally that he must have put on clean ones since doing his golf clubs, and wondered just how dirty he had got the flannels he had had on at luncheon.) She wished, in a way, he wasn't going to be at Dinard all August, that he were going to be at home; but her very love for him, which had led her to a passionate determination that there shouldn't be anything difficult or over-emphasised in their

relation, constrained her to be pleased at his going, to encourage him to be independent, to go about and enjoy himself. She tried not to admit to herself that his glad, careless comings and goings, the equality of pleasure that he found with his family or his friends, hurt her. He was always so glad to come home—and so full of joyous anticipation in going away; and though she wanted him, for his happiness, to have this spontaneous and ubiquitous enjoyment, she realised sometimes how much she longed to let her love for him turn to tyranny, how easily she might resort to the sweetness of keeping him, merely asking him to stay more at home. She knew that if she asked him he would stay, would take her request, perhaps, as quite natural (for her general habit was to make known and expect the fulfilment of her wishes). And yet (apart from her instinctive sense of what was most wise, apart from the restraint which her devotion to him seemed to urge on her as being right) she was afraid merely from an instinct to protect her own peace, of allowing any hint of obligation to enter into his conduct toward her. It might hurt her that he should be so often and so cheerfully away, but she told herself—praying for strength against this longing to tyrannise even a little—that it would hurt her more if he should stay with her for any reason but that he elected to do so. Sometimes she had a painful, whimsical understanding of how puzzled, how almost hurt and mistrustful John would be, if it were suddenly possible for him to realise the intensity and absurd, beautiful subtleties of her feeling for him.

Zina was saying, "Then there ought to be an epic explaining the pictures."

Colin asserted that they might explain themselves. John pointed out that he had been given one sword in his hand and another in the sheath.

"Symbolic perhaps—one for Austria and the other for Hungary." Colin, still sitting cross-legged on the grass, held out the picture at arm's length.

"Pointless symbolism," Zina laughed, and thought what beautiful hands Colin had.

Edgar dared, his eyes twinkling, to make a pun about pointed swords being better than pointless symbols.

"Oh," gasped John, "father's jokes!"—and the entire family set up a genial yell of derision. Wendy perched herself on her father's knee.

"Now, if you make another joke I shall tug your old walrus moustache! Frecher—Kerl!"

Edgar snatched up one of Wendy's pigtails. "And if you are cheeky again, I will str-r-rangle you," he growled, and Wendy chuckled.

"Like Porphyria," said Wendy.

"What d'you know about Porphyria, Wendy?" Zina asked. "I read it in a book in your room, and——" Wendy's look turned to her mother—"and I asked mummie to explain the bits I couldn't understand." She added firmly, "The man strangles the lady with all her gold hair, because she looks so beautiful, and things might never be better and might be worse. *I* think he was silly!"

Colin, at Zina's feet, said in an undertone, "I'm afraid he may have been right," and Zina, glancing at him, was perplexed, and for a second afraid and hurt, wondering what he meant. There were moments, moods, when he said things like this; things that made her either angry (for sometimes it seemed to her that any sort of doubt was ingratitude to Fortune on his part) or afraid, because one couldn't understand his queer, unreasonable apprehensions.

John found the idea incredibly comic. "I remember the thing, the girl comes to tea with the man on a wet day and he simply does her in. Perfect maniac, I should think."

"The happy Philistine!" Edgar remarked; the phrase came aptly as he looked at his son, so glowingly indifferent to the weaknesses, the comic and inexplicable and rather perverse subtleties of a lot of people. He wondered how far this quality, this casual, genial self-righteousness, was merely boyish and how far essential in John's type of mind. He saw Cynthia smile, and knew that she listened with a fond negligence of qualities to her son's remarks, appreciating them with a general tenderness, and watching the sun burnish his yellow hair. Zina got up.

"I think I'm going to bathe before dinner. Let's play tennis first and get really hot!" She wanted to silence the last echo of Colin's murmured remark, which still faintly troubled her; she meant to forget her momentary anxiety.

John agreed. "Rather. You must come and make a four, Father, and Wendy can pick up the balls!"

Wendy climbed off her father's knee.

"Yes, and then you'll play with me just for a little, John, before I go to bed?"

Edgar yawned pleasantly.

"Soon I shall be too old to play."

"Oh, rot, father!"

John and Wendy dragged him off to fetch racquets.

Colin sprang up from the ground and presented his sketch to Cynthia; Zina lingered a little way from the table, watching him and her mother. Certainly Mummie did look very attractive in that grey dress. How quick and slender Colin was! Strong, but not nearly so solid, not so typically athletic-looking as John! She loved the way his head was set on his square, slender shoulders, and the easy, casual poise of his body and his impulsive yet gently deferential manner.

He turned and came and joined her, leaving Cynthia to the deserted tea table and her novel.

"I shall come and watch the game later on," Cynthia called after them; she always set aside a tranquil half-hour for herself after meals, believing that to rush about after eating was bad both for the temper and complexion.

Colin and Zina strolled together in the direction of the tennis court. He glanced at her profile, and said in a nervous, sudden tone:

"Oh, my dear, you are too *lovely*." She didn't look at him, but slipped her hand into his.

"So are you, my dear," she murmured, and gazing before her across the gracious lawns she smiled at the quaintness and inadequacy of her reply.

V

The bathing-place was in one of the wider stretches of the river where the willows on the banks were spaced out so that the sun was on the water all day. Here, too, the river was deeper than in the shadowed parts and gravel at the bottom, so that the adventurous diver ran no risk of burying arms and head in mud. A pavilion had been roughly erected on the bank nearest the house, where those could undress who didn't like a walk through the fields from their bedroom to their bathe; it had outwardly the appearance of a shack in a Wild West screen drama, though inside Cynthia's insistence on white paint and small cupboards and shelves and oilcloth on the floors gave more the impression of an efficient impromptu hospital.

The bathers arrived hot and exhilarated by their game. John was saying:

"Father's too good altogether. . . . He and Zina ought to have given us fifteen each game——" He gave a genial smile and put his hand on his father's shoulder.

"Zina's improved greatly this summer," said Edgar. "Singles with Colin has done her tennis a lot of good."

Colin and John disappeared into the pavilion; Zina, who had undressed at the house, went and stood on the end of the diving board and looked down into the water.

"Oh, what a lovely evening!" She spoke half to herself, half to her father, who had sat down on the bank. Wendy had wandered off in search of a moorhen's nest; she would have liked to bathe too, but knew it was no use asking to be allowed to so soon after tea.

Zina slipped off her cloak and yawned, stretching out her arms and bending back her head until she looked up at the ethereal radiance of the sky. She smiled because the approaching evening was so still and mellow and golden, and because John and Colin while they undressed were whistling the same silly tune in different keys. The tune —it was a music hall success of the moment—infected her lazy brain, and she began to hum it in a half tone, bouncing the diving board up and down under her toes:

". . . He had to get *out and*
Get out and get *under* . . ."

She tucked her hair more securely under her cap—

"To see to his *little* machine . . . "

She broke off. "Father, what an absurd, tiresome, half-yard of convention a bathing gown is!"

Edgar grunted.

"Don't you agree, father?" Zina turned to look at him. His panama was tilted over his eyes and he held a piece of grass between his lips. He pushed back the hat and glanced at his daughter poised above the river.

"One must be tolerant, Zina. We are still half savages, and so these things must be, bathing gowns, marriage contracts, systems of justice. We are no longer animals and not yet gods. Hence," he smiled, "hence our half-yards of convention."

Zina dived and came up with a sigh.

"O-o-o—how divinely cool!" She swam over to the opposite bank. John and Colin emerged from the pavilion. John took a running dive, shot up into the air and down, swallow-wise, into the water. Colin was less graceful; he ran, landed with a smack and came up spluttering and laughing.

"My stomach must be vermilion after that!" He swam over to Zina in rapid, jerky strokes; she dived under water, disappearing completely. John, who was treading water, roared suddenly: "She's got hold of my ankle," and disappeared also, re-emerging with Zina.

"*Now* I'll duck you."

Zina, whose cap had come off and whose breath was spent in laughter and sub-aquatic gymnastics, implored mercy.

"*Oh*, John—John, *darling*—I—I thought your ankle was a water-lily. Oh, John, please!"

"All right, then, I'll life-save you, turn over!" Zina exhausted, floated on her back and allowed her brother to seize her shoulders and tow her to land. He flung her on to the bank.

"Heavens—you are strong!" she gasped, and lay panting in the grass. John grinned complacently and climbed out after her, shaking his head like a hefty retriever.

"D'you want artificial respiration!" he demanded. She shook her head violently; this particular trick which

John had learnt at his private school had been a menace to his family ever since. Once Zina had allowed him to experiment on her, but the process had been so painful that John was only permitted to indulge now in the threat of using his skill.

John dived in again; then he and Colin both came out on to the bank and sprawled on the grass and lit cigarettes.

"Should like really to have a chance of saving someone's life," John remarked. "Rather fun, you know—to see if it really could be done. Suppose one'd feel awfully nervy if one knew the man was actually drowning."

"You'd do it beautifully, John," Zina murmured. "Father, be a dear and throw me over that towel beside you!" She sat up and began to untangle her dripping plaits.

"If I go in again," she said, "then I shall only get my hair wetter than ever, and my cap must be somewhere at the bottom of the river. . . ." She went on vigorously rubbing her head.

"Bore long hair must be," John remarked.

"I wish I could have mine cut short like a page! Lots of art student girls do—it's rather becoming——"

John snorted genially. "Don't be silly. Anyway; mummie wouldn't let you."

"I know. What would *you* say, father?"

"I should say that it is distinctly not my affair."

"Anyway," Zina's tone was of final resignation, "Nannie wouldn't allow it."

Colin said, "I think I should be sorry," in a cool voice, and with a look whose depth and sweetness touched her like a curious, momentary hypnotism. She turned her face away from him and said unsteadily:

"There's Wendy."

"I wonder whether she has discovered her moorhen's nest." Edgar got up and held out his arms in welcome to his youngest daughter. "Well, my sweetest?"

Wendy scampered up to him.

"I *did* find it—quite near where John went through the ice last Christmas! I *knew* there must be one there." She surveyed the recumbent group. "Have you all finished bathing already?"

John nodded. "'Fraid so, Sausage."

"Oh, damn! I did want to see you dive!"

Edgar put one hand on Wendy's shoulder and with the other tilted up her chin and made her look him in the eyes.

"Wendy, I will not allow you to swear. Do you understand? I explained to you last week exactly why I will not allow it."

He looked stern and spoke slowly. Wendy met his look without wavering, but a pink colour spread over her face, and she clenched and unclenched her hands. She didn't like to seem foolish in front of all the others, especially in front of John; also she knew that her father was right, because he had explained sensibly all the reasons why people of a privileged class should not lose control and use ugly, meaningless words.

"I'm very sorry," she whispered, and Edgar saw that for once she was genuinely so, and let her go. And Colin diverted the general attention by finding a ladybird in the grass.

A figure in white was coming from the direction of the house. Wendy saw out of the tail of her eye and became absorbed in the ladybird. Nannie approached the group. John sprang up, wrapping his bath towel round himself, and hoping that Nannie might not notice that he had a wet bathing gown on underneath—she disapproved of sitting about in wet bathing gowns. Zina also huddled herself into her cloak, and then observed Colin smiling at her and John and then at Nannie.

Edgar asked: "Well, Nannie, how was the flower show?"

"Very nice indeed, Sir Edgar; magnificent show they've got there, though some of the blooms were over a bit to-day. It's hard on them—two days in a hot tent. I spoke to Mr. Grimmer, and he says it's the best show they've had—people take more interest each year."

"You know our tea-roses got a prize?"

Nannie beamed. "Yes, indeed—beautiful they are!" she added gently. "Always remind me of those sort of yellow sunsets you get in wet weather."

"Poetic you are, Nan," remarked John.

She turned her tranquil gaze on him. "You go and get

dressed, John, instead of standing about in your wet costume, and you too, Zina . . . " She hesitated verbally to include Colin in her manifesto, but he complied with the unspoken inclusion and hurried off to dress. In such an atmosphere of obedience Wendy did not venture to object to "bed-time," and accompanied Nannie back to the house, retailing, with some exaggeration, her adventures in search of the moorhen's nest. As they entered by the side entrance and ascended the back staircase toward the nursery, Nannie remarked: "It will be a good thing when you learn the difference between fact and fiction."

Wendy went up two steps at a time, holding tightly to the banisters. "I don't see why it will!"

"Now you're being foolish," said Nannie firmly.

"Well, well, well," sighed Wendy, and hurried into the nursery to see if there were ginger biscuits or "petit-beurre" with her milk this evening.

VI

Edgar came indoors as the dressing gong sounded. On the hall table was a letter from his elder brother, Alfred. It had the mark of Budapest and had been posted three days previously—on the 20th. Edgar went up and dressed quickly; through the second door of his room he could hear Cynthia in her room explaining to her maid exactly how she wished the lace to be put on her new tea-gown. " . . . not gathered *at all*, Lucas, at the sleeves . . . just put on lightly with a beading and the narrow Valenciennes to finish it off inside. . . ."

He returned downstairs, took Alfred's letter into the library and sat down in an armchair by one of the long windows. He and his brother corresponded at long, regular intervals; they met seldom, for Edgar was most of the year necessarily in England, while Alfred's position in the family banking business kept him in Vienna. Occasionally he went to South America, the bank having a branch in San Paolo, and though he had for years planned to visit his younger brother in England, he had never found sufficient leisure. In fact the last time the two brothers met had been when Edgar and Cynthia were in Vienna on their honeymoon, when old Frau Von Renner

was still alive to proffer them her famous hospitality. Alfred had continued after their mother's death to inhabit the old high family "Palais" in the "Innere-Stadt," though he had ventured, after her demise, to instal electric light and several bathrooms. Both these things she had considered luxuries, though her horses and stabling, her jewels and dinner parties, upheld the gorgeous and elaborate traditions of an age and society which she would never admit to be breaking up—a society to be imagined by future generations as incredibly gay and grand, incredibly constructed of pomps and glamour, court balls and operas, emperors and ballet dancers, uniforms and waltzes.

Alfred wrote in German:

My Dearest Edgar,

I have arrived here in Budapest for a few days and am staying with the Von Hauptmann's, as I have a brief holiday. I return to Vienna on the 23rd, but meanwhile I make use of my leisure to write to you.

Your last letters tells me that you like very much the "braütigam" of your daughter; I am overjoyed at this and that your wife too is pleased, and I congratulate my niece. When I am again in Vienna I will choose her a present. You say, also, that your son is happy at Oxford; I hope that he works well and will get a good degree. The more I have seen of men in every profession, army, business whatever it is they take up in the end, even if it is looking after one's own estate, the more I think a complete general mental training is important. This new educational theory of early specialisation, which derives from Germany, I believe to be false and unjust to the human soul. But this, the mention of Germany, leads me on to the more grave aspect of my letter.

I have not written to you since April, when the European situation, though not peaceful, did not seem immediately to menace either our countries or, consequently, our private lives. Nor have I had a letter from you since the horrible episode at Serajevo. Therefore I do not know what you may have thought or may think about European politics at this moment—when any day our ultimatum will be sent to Belgrade—and I feel I must write to you

before, perhaps, political relations will make our correspondence not only inadvisable (for you are now an Englishman, while I am still an Austrian) but impossible.

It is difficult to tell just how the newspapers in England and your public opinion regard the situation between us and the Servians and how far they realise what is happening from the point of view of how it is going to affect countries not in Central Europe. You comment in your letter of June 19 on the Czar's recent visit to Rumania, and you say also, "There is no doubt that if Austria should let her tyrannical policy with regard to the smaller States (of whom she is really afraid) involve her in war in the Balkans, it will not be only a Balkan State with which she will have to contend!" This is only too true; should Russia tolerate a blow against Servia, our authority would be strengthened right into Turkey and Russian prestige would be correspondingly weakened. A blow against Servia will be a blow against Russia!

The traditions of our Government make it certain that there must be war (the ultimatum which we send will be no more than a preliminary form), otherwise the peoples under the House of Hapsburg will break loose from our irresolute and impotent Dual Monarchy. Austria will not make up her mind to grant to her subject-peoples, who have been refractory and at variance for so many years, the freedom for which they long; she will not split herself up to form small independent states, though these would prove themselves, I believe, the truest friends to the originator of their liberty. On the contrary, the practice of the Dual Monarchy has always been to occupy and annex, thus constantly adding to her own embarrassments. Moreover, nothing short of the moral effect produced by generous and systematic emancipation of the subject-peoples would have sufficed to make Austria greater in spite of territorial diminution, and to lessen the isolation of her position. The shots fired at Serajevo have made it too late for such a policy; concession and inactivity would be interpreted as the most unmistakable symptom of weakness. Our aggressive policy will be fundamentally a policy of defence.

Nevertheless many well-informed persons even here, for

instance, Von Hauptmann, who is a personal friend of Berchtold, believe that it still is possible to avoid war "somehow," without exactly explaining "how." In the last few years the menace of war has blown over so often that men have lost the power of imagining the actual occurrence of the monstrous fact. Also they have been deceived by the apparent calm which for a fortnight succeeded the Serajevo murders; though the Austrian and Servian newspapers heaped insults upon one another, there was no apparent political crisis, and Vienna let nothing be known about her intentions.

Above all, the dominant fact which the public both here and in Europe generally have not realised (and they may, therefore, be pardoned their blind optimism) is the part that Germany is playing in precipitating our Government into war.

Two days ago, on the 17th, I had business in Berlin and was given the following account by a thoroughly initiated personage:

Immediately before the Kaiser started on his Scandinavian cruise on July 7, a conference with the Austrians had taken place in Berlin. The Kaiser had assured our representatives that he was with them through thick and thin. These declared that a sharp note would be despatched to Servia within eight days. The Note was to be in the form of an ultimatum, with a time limit of 48 hours, and to contain all the demands which were necessary to secure for Austria-Hungary respect and tranquillity. These demands were for the punishment of all Servian officers compromised by the murder, for the dissolution of all Pan-Servian clubs, and in general for immediate satisfaction on a number of definite issues. The text of the Note had apparently *not been agreed upon at all*, undoubtedly a dangerous omission on the part of the German diplomatists, in view of the risk attaching to the venture. Our Government was thus in effect given "carte blanche"; Germany was committed to unconditional approval of all that might be contained in the Note.

I also learnt that the Kaiser had made to our representatives the following positive promises:

"Should Russia not acquiesce in Vienna's demands on Servia, but proceed to mobilise, he would forthwith declare mobilisation in Germany, and this would mean war."

Our representatives therefore returned to Vienna with the most far-reaching assurances conceivable.

When I said to my informant in Berlin that under these circumstances we were faced with inevitable and immediate war, he shrugged his shoulders and said that at any rate it looked like it. I think he was surprised at the gravity and horror of my tone.

The predictions that I make when I regard the situation at the moment are to me so actual and so terrible that I am amazed when Bertha Von Hauptmann comes into the room, as she did a moment ago, and asks me if I will go with them to Deauville in August, where they have taken a villa. We shall go to war with Servia and Russia; Germany, who has been positively waiting for this explosion, will join us. France is pledged to join Russia, and she will, moreover, gladly seize an opportunity to revenge herself for her humiliation of 1870. I do not know whether England will remain neutral; to my knowledge Vienna and Berlin certainly expect her to do so. I have wondered whether, if England were clearly pledged to support France and Russia, Germany would so recklessly have encouraged our provocation of war.

By the time this letter reaches you our Note will have been sent to Belgrade and I shall be returning to Vienna. I am already making arrangements to replace the men of military age in the bank by old men, and by women in the lower clerks' positions, for I am sure that in a week we shall be mobilising. I shall send your Zina her gift while it is still possible.

So far, my dearest Edgar, I have not spoken of the personal side of the situation, though in the last few weeks that has been at the back of my mind. Whether your adopted country will remain neutral or whether it will fight against us, it is not yet possible to predict. But in either case I do not think that our respect and affection for each other will be altered; I hope and believe not. I think that undoubtedly we are both too cosmopolitan in sympathies

to, what the English call, "take sides" with such narrow rancour that our personal affection should be destroyed. Alas, I see my own country only too clearly encouraged by a young and brutal and unscrupulous nation, to uphold a played-out tradition and a decayed and tragic monarchy. Austria is the tool of Prussian ambition, the deceived victim of Prussian aggrandisement. We have nothing in common with the Germans except language—and even in that the words and phrases are modified by French; their Empire is new and ours is old; they have their history to make, while ours dates back through six centuries; their manners, laws, customs and clothes are different; they are raw and we are mellowed to decay.

Bertha has just entered again to say that we dine in ten minutes before going to the theatre. "Buda" is crammed with visitors at present, many French and Americans. I will write again in a few days if it is still possible, and I beg you to write me and tell me your views and feelings. I send my love to Cynthia and the children (I liked so much the photograph of the whole family you sent me), and to yourself my dear Edgar.

Always your loving brother,
ALFRED VON RENNER.

Edgar folded up the letter, smoothing it mechanically between finger and thumb, pressing together the thick pages patterned with Alfred's clear, wiry handwriting; an observant section of his mind noted that it was characteristic of Alfred to redeem any possible over-emphasis of emotion in his messages by signing his full name. The rest of Edgar's mind was darkened by an increasingly tense oppression; he continued to finger the letter and look out of the window; westward, across the park, without realising the vast flooding beauty of the sunset or the majesty of the cedar tree's silhouette. He didn't reason or reflect, he hadn't yet even a mental grasp of what he had read, and of the implications (even the obvious implications) of what his brother so uncompromisingly stressed. Staring into the western sky, phrases from the letter echoed in his mind: "They are raw and we are mellowed to decay—a decayed and tragic monarchy." (Even in his grimmest moments

Alfred had always liked to turn a phrase!) "A blow against Servia will be a blow against Russia——" That one had known—problematically. That's how it had seemed, a terrible but not inevitable and imminent problem. For the past week Edgar had considered and dismissed—and again considered such possibilities—war—in Europe.

"All these quarrels in Southern Europe," Cynthia had said. In England one didn't, couldn't easily, realise the actuality of these crises—mere newspaper headlines. ("Another war in the Balkans," and "Captain Coe's Finals"). In England, England anyway (Edgar exorcised the suggestion)—England wouldn't be involved because an Austrian Archduke was—— Edgar checked his facile stringing together of excuses. "They have their history to make——"

Germany, her army, navy, her magnificent organisation. One had always said, "Of course Germany *might*—but——" "If," thought Edgar, "*if*——" He wrenched his reason from its stupor, from a kind of groping dizziness. "If they fight, Austria and Servia, and they *must*," he painfully braced himself to admit, "then Russia and Germany, Italy probably, France, then England——"

Lit by the sunset, his face, rugged, sharply sorrowful, the lids half closed, had the hewn sublimity of sculpture. He was quite still as realisation came to him with the stabbing and jarring of awakening pain; a realisation of what it meant—these phrases and crises and situations—what they might, even at best, mean to Europe, to nations, to the millions of absurd, pitiful little creatures, who read headlines. For a moment, dazzled by the flood of light, agonised in every nerve, he understood; he had a revelation so clear and swift and blinding that he could only feel, with a sense of unutterable loss, that in that flash he had understood, seen or foreseen (time was hardly an element) not merely all the great and petty implications of a possibly approaching war, but something more—words, thoughts couldn't recall it—the sense of loss remained, and the haunting knowledge that in that second he *had* comprehended, though he was left, as before, to make himself face the immediate situation and possibilities. "If England——" The letter was still between

his fingers; a sweet, vigorous scent emanated from the bowl of sweet-peas on the table at his elbow. The dinner gong sounded in the hall.

Zina, in a green picture-frock, appeared in the doorway of the library. "Father, darling—dinner!"

He slipped the letter into his pocket and rose from the armchair. Zina didn't notice that he looked tired.

VII

Cynthia did notice. She glanced at her husband several times during dinner and decided that it was not merely the blend of twilight with candlelight that made him look worn. (Cynthia always had the candles lit on the dinner table even at Midsummer.) He seemed preoccupied and ate little, and only smiled once when he met his wife's glance; his imagination likened her at the moment, framed by the tall candles, to a gracious and vivacious saint presiding over the company; one day, he reflected, he would tell her that, and she would laugh. Then he forgot her again.

Cynthia thought, "I shall certainly insist on his taking me to Venice in September. He needs a holiday, poor dear Hans!"

Zina was peculiarly joyous this evening; she bubbled with laughter, made a sequence of absurd jokes and showed an inclination, towards the end of the meal, to become noisy and throw bread-pills across the table at John.

Colin restrained her. "Zina, please——" Her high spirits amused him, but he didn't want her to grow excited, having experienced her reactions to such a condition, when she would become morose or irritable. She turned to Colin, still laughing.

"Oh, my *dear*. . . . I could have hit him *right* in the middle of his forehead!"

Cynthia, staid and humorous, remarked, "It doesn't suit you to be 'gamine,' Zina!" and changed the subject before her daughter could express resentment of such a comment.

The conversation became general; Cynthia, with the air of a fastidious child picking its way across a farmyard, was expressing herself on "modern art." Zina inclined to be defensive, John amused.

"*Why*," Cynthia demanded, "am I expected to be impressed and moved to rapture by a conglomeration of squares and triangles and circles daubed into the canvas?"

"But, Mummie, it isn't *meant* to be beautiful in the sort of pictorial, traditional way. You aren't *supposed* just to look and say, 'What a pretty table and chair and what a nice-looking kitten playing with that ball of blue wool.' You aren't *meant* to have just a sort of simple, æsthetic reaction."

Cynthia bent an amused and complacent gaze on her daughter and said encouragingly, "Well, what *am* I meant to have, darling? A digestive reaction?"

Colin broke in, "I think I agree with you up to a certain point, Lady Renner. I think most of the Cubist stuff, especially the English Cubists, is ugly and muddled and more or less meaningless. I do think though," he pursued, fixing his direct gaze on her and modifying the decision of his statement by his charming, deferential manner. "I do think that there *is* force and vitality in the work of certain Cubist artists. When I was in Italy in the Spring I saw some Cubist sculpture done by a man in Rome, and I thought it perfectly amazing!"

Zina was soothed and invaded by a glow of pleasure as she saw her mother's deliberate pose of negligence modified by Colin's words. His manner, his quiet tones were attractive and he had this peculiar way of offering opinions, even those most opposed to his listener's views, as though they were bouquets, a tribute to the listener.

"The most ordinary one," he was saying, "was a huge rugged piece of bronze statuary called 'Eternal Motion.' It's almost impossible to describe. I wish you could see it. It just *did* give one the feeling, by a lot of geometrical-looking ridges and lines and curves, of a—a force, going on for ever and ever and ever. An impression of tremendous power and ceaselessness, I wish you could have seen it——" He turned now to Zina. She nodded.

"So do I." She was fascinated when Colin, plunging into some topic, was carried away on the tide of his enthusiasm, becoming oblivious of himself, of personalities, of anything but the depths of his subject; she was fascinated, and, at the same time, inclined to feel herself unreasonably

ignored, *as* herself; to feel that she must either be a fellow-adventurer and enthusiast or nothing; and that in these moments she herself, Zina, with her soft, dark eyes and ruddy hair and all her impassioned adoration of him, wasn't alive to him at all. She added, "We must go and see them together." He agreed; and then, as though his comprehension were suddenly illumined by the more intimate implications of her words, his look gave her swiftly and beautifully to understand to what vistas of adventure "together" might lead them.

Cynthia rose from the table; she slipped her arm through Zina's. They had, together, their hair and pearls and dresses gleaming in the light of the candles, a lovely appearance of youth and graciousness.

Colin stood back to let them pass, and John, holding the door open, surveyed them with approval. Edgar watched them as they went out into the hall, felt it as strange that he should, to such an extent, be responsible for them—for their rareness and peace and elegance, and for all their fragrant immunities.

. . . . .

This came to him again later in the evening, when he was sitting alone at the writing-table in the library, a half-written letter to his brother on the blotting-pad. The letter somehow harped on the one theme—was there a possibility of England being involved?

He thought, that is what it must always come back to one's own country, interests, family, one's hopes and fears in a crisis always running in small circles If—if there were to be a crisis. He laid down his pen, stared at the last sentence he had written, the ink was still wet.

"So far the whole idea of war is not held at all here; we feel there is no question, above all, of a war in which England would be involved. The politicians and newspapers are too busy with the Irish Rebellion and the Suffragette outrages."

He thought, "One's own interests, one's own family, their immunities——" that had never struck him strangely, almost threateningly, until this evening. Cynthia and Zina, shoulder to shoulder, white arms linked, delicate

colouring and confident glances. In all this, though Cynthia might say that she had seen more of "life"—felt more, than Zina, they could be classed together; his wife and daughter and all the other intelligent, gracious women and girls whose lives never touched real ugliness, dullness, the petty degradations of poverty, the small vulgarities of cheap surroundings. Women whose rareness, whose fine looks and sensibilities, whose delicacies of body and mind and soul were made possible by these "immunities." Money and the traditions of money (not to have, but converted into innumerable beauties of surroundings and experience and possessions) these guarded them, set the limits of their domain, excluded whole tracts of sordidness and dirt and brutality—so that they could live like princesses in a garden.

He started as Colin came in, and hesitated in the shadows of the room, beyond the circle of light shed by the lamp on the writing-table.

"Am I disturbing you? I came to look for a book. I wanted to show Zina something."

Edgar turned. He could just discern the narrow shape of Colin's face and the staring whiteness of his shirt front.

"What book?"

"Meredith's poetry—*The Day of the Daughter of Hades*—Zina says she's never read it."

"Put on the light, you will find all the Meredith on those shelves in the corner."

Colin obeyed.

"Oh, yes, I see. I do like this edition." He took down a volume. He glanced round the entire room, which was lined to the ceiling with bookshelves, and added:

"I always envy you your library tremendously, there's something so good and satisfying in being surrounded by shelves and shelves of books; they're the only sort of possessions I think that are good in themselves; most 'having' merely spoils people's sense of proportion in life."

Edgar nodded, watching the sensitive, decisive young features of his future son-in-law.

Colin continued, balancing the volume on his palm, "I think the ideal house would be a motor library."

Edgar smiled. "Does Zina agree with that?"

"Well, I've only just thought of it, but I'm certain

she would." He stopped playing with the volume in his hands. "Do you know the thing I mean in here?" He came and perched himself on the corner of the writing-table and began to turn over pages.

"It is a long time since I read it." Edgar put the letter to his brother in a drawer, and leant back in his chair, still fixing Colin with his prolonged, gentle look.

"Here it is! I think this bit is so amazing." He lounged across the table so that he held the book under the full rays of the lamp—"Where it describes Proserpine's progress, when the young man's watching her:

She followed the lines of wheat
Tripping straight through the field, green blades,
To the groves of olive grey,
Downy-grey, golden-tinged; and to glades
Where the pear-blossom thickens the spray
In a night, like the snow-packed storm:
Pear, apple, almond, plum;
Not wintry now; pushing, warm!
And she touched them with finger and thumb,
As the vine-hook closes: she smiled,
Recounting again and again,
Corn, wine, fruit, oil!—like a child,
With the meaning known to men."

Colin paused, and glanced, eagerly, familiarly, on, down the page—"I like this bit about

The shade-loved white windflowers, half-hid
And the sun-loving lizards and snakes."

He broke off. "I shall take Zina to Sicily in the Spring! Heavenly place!"

Edgar checked an "if that is possible," meeting Colin's direct, joyous look, feeling that it would somehow be a desecration to remind him that perhaps—to indicate obstacles.

But Colin himself recollected, with abrupt seriousness, the conversation at tea, and became aware of Edgar's silence.

"I'd forgotten," he sat upright again—"I'd quite forgotten this Southern Europe business. It may be over by then though"; his tone vaguely invited an opinion.

"It is impossible yet to foretell anything."

"D'you think the Servians are going to accept Austria's conditions? or, anyway, that Austria wants to accept their acceptance?"

Edgar grimly acquiesced in the suggestion.

"Austria wishes to fight; it is a question of prestige."

Colin was silent, reflective; he murmured incidentally: "How lovely those sweet-peas smell!" Then, after another pause, "Well, we shall have our own Civil War to deal with. I'm almost tempted to go and fight against Ulster."

Edgar was surprised.

"I thought you held the orthodox Liberal view! That you believed only in obtaining Home Rule for them through parliamentary action?"

"It's too late for that now. Ulster's mood is impossible. The Liberals did all they could peacefully; but the younger Nationalists don't believe in Redmond any more—they're hot-blooded, one doesn't wonder. We're merely paying our administrative debts of centuries!"

"As the Hapsburg Empire is doing," Edgar spoke slowly, groping in his mind for the broad, verbal expression of what he envisaged, political generations somehow organised in cycles of atonement. "That is how I see it, Colin, all over the world—this 'payment of administrative debts,' as you call it; it seems to me inexorable, mathematical. Always there is in each state, in each nation, in each empire, in each unit of power, first of all internal consolidation and growth; then conquest; then gradually oppression; then revolution or war. Where there is wisdom in government and the desire to be just, the interval between conquest and oppression may be long; but always in the end there is oppression, either because the governed grow strong and worthy of independence, or because the governors begin to abuse their power; and always in the end there is the conflict of forces and bloodshed. It has been so in the history of empires, and of nations and of great races and families—and of religions and political movements. It is almost banal to speak of Athens and Rome—Spain, France; great families like the Medici and the Este's of the Renaissance; that great Hebrew race whose spiritual pride led them to oppression—the Roman

Catholic Church—again oppression, bigotry, cruelty and war. There is always this final reaction to the tyranny of a unit of power, whether it is an emperor or a landlord or a plantation owner in the cotton states, or any employer of labour." Edgar leant forward, rested his elbow on the table, "Always there seems to be this force working, turning like a great machine without ceasing, without pity or consciousness of the individual—a force which brings about always the abuse of power; and we think, perhaps, that it is unjust that we, you and I, and the men and women that we know, should pay for the mistakes of political and social generations that are long since dead, and that we should become, perhaps, involved and crushed in the working of this great machine of cause and result; and we are astonished that we are battered and our plans and our conceptions of how life should be, ignored by these forces and their reactions." He paused, staring into the shadows beyond the electric lamp—"When there is rebellion or civil war in Ireland it will not be because Asquith could not lately pass the Home Rule Bill, or because of the religious differences as they are *now*, or the sense of injustice that the young Nationalists have *now*. Cromwell began what Asquith could not undo by Act of Parliament, and Cromwell would not have been in a position to act as he did if there had not been the Reformation in the preceding century, and that made necessary . . ." He broke off, whimsically almost, recalling his gaze to his listener. "What I mean is that, as in heredity, one goes back in such matters and, perhaps, never finds that *one* cause or influence; the chain of deeds and circumstances and forces is too complex, too subtle, and when there is a war between Austria and Servia, it will not be merely because Austria is now weak and the Emperor old, and because his son was murdered by a casual assassin; and when there are labour conflicts it is not merely because the men in the union want a rise of two shillings a week and the employer will not grant more than one shilling rise; immediate causes are incidental, and often what is fought for is incidental and trivial compared to the influences that have for centuries been working ceaselessly towards such a climax. It is the custom to be surprised at revolu-

tion, and it is the custom to be surprised at war; we are, in our millions, so infinitesimal in relation to the forces which affect us that we cannot normally apprehend them; the strength and extent of our vision is too small, our understanding too limited; we are"—the slow twinkle showed in Edgar's eyes, though he still retained his urgent, impressive pose—"we are like fleas hopping about in the dust under the very shadow of a steam-roller; it is too vast and incomprehensible for us to realise; we hear and see nothing though the great iron machine rolls nearer and nearer, even when we are in its shadow, and then, suddenly it is upon us——" He leant back, relaxed, and mechanically felt for his cigar-case.

"Ach Himmel, I left it in the hall, I suppose."

Colin started. "Left what?"

"Only my cigar-case."

"I'll get it." Colin got up from his perch on the corner of the table and departed before Edgar could protest.

"Thank you." Edgar took the proffered case and offered it to the bearer.

"No thanks." Colin took up his book. "Curious," he remarked, "to think of all the political trouble going on at this moment—and we can talk of it quite abstractedly and peacefully, just because we happen to be safe."

Edgar puffed at his cigar and wreaths of smoke circled and trailed away in the dim, rich atmosphere of the room.

Colin continued—to Edgar he appeared as he stood there singularly grave and youthful and somehow unreal (a Whistlerian vision of a young man). "I suppose one can apply such a remark to oneself at any moment from the point of view of social conditions; I mean one is so—so grossly safe!" He lifted his left hand in a typical slight gesture. "One's never really 'up against it'—as war or poverty must put a man 'up against it'—and it's such a fearful temptation and so desperately easy never to use one's imagination and realise the condition of other people who really are at grips with life——"

"Colin!"—it was Zina's voice.

He paused, turned swiftly towards the door. "Yes?"

"Come and dance in the drawing-room, Colin."

"I'm coming, my dear."

. . . . .

Edgar sat on alone and smoked. The long windows were wide open to the summer night and he could identify the Plough among the stars above the trees; an owl was hooting distantly like a spirit in queer, incessant surprise. From the drawing-room he caught the strains of the gramophone, faint and lilting, the same silly thing the children were always singing:

Get out *and get* under,
Get out *and get* under,
To see to his little *machine,*
And he *was dying for love of his queen.* . . .

He found himself humming it too and conducting gently with his right hand.

VIII

It was a week later, on August 1, that the Barrett-Saundersons came over, an event trivial enough and unremarkable in itself, for they had a neighbourly, though not at the time intimate, relation with the household of Pelham Court. They came to luncheon and remained to play tennis, and to Zina—as to the others—they seemed an incident in the day far less portentous than her discovery that she had neglected to buy two extra Kodak films to use over the Bank Holiday week-end.

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson was, to a first view, slight and well-dressed and well-mannered; to a second view, she was pretty, dark-eyed and scarcely powdered, and seemed enigmatic, perhaps because her eyelids drooped a little, perhaps because her red mouth framed her words with a precision which suggested restraint both of opinion and expression. Cynthia didn't genuinely like her; her good manners were of so cool an order that she never warmed either to personal or any kind of artistic enthusiasm, and something in her looks, some transparency of tint in contrast with the crescent shadows of long lashes, gave a suggestion of "maquillage" and delicately invited the term "seductive."

Cynthia liked the husband, and laughed off a mild chagrin that over the couple she and Edgar should hold opposite opinions, though in discussion they had never

gone further than being sorry for the one they preferred. But whereas Edgar felt for the wife a genuine pity, Cynthia said, "One rather pities poor George Barrett-Saunderson," and was pleased to see his solid, handsome person seated at her table.

The couple had only settled in the neighbourhood two years previously: George had just left the Scots Guards and married Olive, whom he had met at the house of her wealthy, mediocre and politically-minded parents, and had determined to live a country life within easy access of London. The hunting he knew was mediocre, but he hunted from convention and preferred shooting, while his summer, which he began at Cannes in February, was rigorously devoted to tennis. He was handsome, as eight Guardsmen in every ten tend to handsomeness, with a glance whose direct blankness is popularly held to imply courage—a supposition reinforced by a square cleft chin and a general neat massiveness of feature; his bearing indicated primarily physical strength and mental propriety (propriety as conceived by *his* mentality), and the finer shades of his personality—should such shades lurk in the orderly, though not peculiarly fruitful, estates of his soul—were anyway decently out of sight. It was not that he was essentially a soldier (he had chosen the army rather than another profession because of "the experience and out-of-door life," and to fill in the years between eighteen and thirty, when "one ought to have a profession"): his interests, apart from sport, were political, and he was negotiating for a convenient constituency in the same manner (that of fulfilling a high obligation), as he yearly booked well in advance his "wagon-lits" on the "train bleu." Any incompatibility of himself with his wife was as little apparent to him as to any casual observer, he being in such matters the casual observer incarnate, and in this rôle merely complacently aware that they got on splendidly and that Olive fulfilled all her obligations, social, sumptuary and conjugal—save that so far she hadn't produced a descendant. In public he called her "Olive darling," treated her with a kind of proprietary consideration and ignored any expression of opinion on her part as though she had hiccoughed, or drowned it by some louder

and weightier opinion of his own, which was, as it were, a cough to her hiccough, a notoriously more respectable sound.

At luncheon he delivered himself of judgments on the Irish situation, conceived originally by the "Morning Post." He argued with Colin, and of the two Colin came nearest to loss of temper, feeling himself baited by a kind of glazed arrogance in Barrett-Saunderson's eye. Once, during the argument, Colin was aware of Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson's glance, somewhat ironical, from under the curve of her hat. The Irish question, with its facility for turning red-hot at conversational touch, was dropped, and the talk was again, and throughout the afternoon, of war and rumours of war; of Austria and Servia, Russia and Germany, Germany and France and so, with a general recoil in the form of scepticism or light optimism, of England, or meditation, of Sir Edward Grey.

The discussion, prophecies and comments were made in a tone sufficiently attuned to the light thudding to and fro of tennis balls between those who weren't at the moment grouped idly on white garden seats on the edge of the court: one who didn't comprehend English and only had a visual and musical understanding of the scene would have supposed from their attitudes, the cadences of their voices, that they were speaking of matters pleasantly but not at all urgently associated with their lives, some mild social exchange of words which left them half their attention to note the progress of the sets, to applaud a stroke, comment on a service, or amusedly make a wager.

Edgar only played one set: he was tired and distrait, and wondered at moments, grasping his racquet and watching Zina's flying form on the other side of the net, whether Europe or his own tennis court, so green and firm under his tread, were an hallucination. Colin was playing with Zina; they were steady and confident together, played bareheaded and laughed easily over their reverses. Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson was Edgar's partner, and he felt apologetic that to-day the unsteadiness of his game so inadequately backed the swift, almost facile, brilliance of her play: she hit with driving accuracy and yet appeared while she played cool and uninterested. When Edgar

apologised she merely turned on him her precise smile and offered a conventional excuse for his failure.

Edgar caught phrases from the bench of onlookers. Cynthia's voice: "No possible reason why we *should* after all . . . " Barrett-Saunderson's tones: "Don't think so really myself . . . understanding with France, though . . . the Kaiser . . . made up his mind to have a war!" John's determined judgment: "Won't *dare* to . . . we'd smash 'em in a month . . . look at our navy!" Cynthia again: "I suppose we might send one or two squadrons—perhaps some of our regulars. Shall you rejoin, Captain Barrett-Saunderson?" Edgar didn't catch the whole answer, merely "Not much chance really of my being necessary, though I wouldn't mind a 'scrap'!"

Wendy came running across the lawn, a fat white rabbit under one arm and an early edition of an evening paper under the other; she shouted to Edgar: "This has just come, Daddy."

Edgar nodded and served a double fault.

Cynthia held out her hand for the paper.

"Give it to me, darling!" She unfolded it—"France mobilizing—Russia at War."

Zina exclaimed: "*Daddy*, you are playing badly—*do* play up—oh, good *shot*, Colin!"

Captain Barrett-Saunderson took the proffered paper from Cynthia and carefully reread the headlines as though to ascertain that she had read them out accurately. He hadn't in this the least consciousness of possibly seeming rude, and merely acted in a minor way, on one of his convictions, e.g. that women, though often charming and, up to a certain point, desirably intelligent, were inaccurate and incapable of dealing with facts; facts being, in his view, fuel only for the male intellect, a contention which he would illustrate by saying that "Men read newspapers and women read novels." Cynthia didn't resent the marked reflection on her intelligence since the handsome Captain had a sufficient appreciation of her general charm, and would smile, showing the regular white teeth under his brown moustache, at her moderated witticisms—Cynthia had a keen sense of apt conversational diet, and took a

certain pride (for which she laughed at herself when she was socially *en négligé*) in stimulating an intellectual response of a congenial sort in any male creature, from the foot-boy, who adored her, to the most baleful literary "lion" or the most inane of pleasure-surfeited young men. With women she was more obviously high-handed.

Wendy put the rabbit down on the grass and regarded it with an air of concern.

"I'm so afraid he's going to burst," she said.

Cynthia restrained a smile.

"Poor Peter—why?" she demanded.

Wendy turned her limpid gaze on John and Captain Barrett-Saunderson as though to enlist their sympathy.

"Some confounded fool gave him a saucer of water in his hutch last night and there isn't any water left this morning—and—and he *does* look so fat and queer!"

Cynthia ignored the epithet of abuse in sympathy for Wendy's genuine concern. "I think he'll get over it, my precious—water isn't necessarily fatal, you know. I should just let him rest and make quite sure that he doesn't get any more."

The Captain gently picked up the victim of this temperate indulgence and held it in his arms and stroked its ears; it blinked and twitched its mouth.

"I don't think you need worry," he said to Wendy with a seriousness which was unassumed. "The beast'll little be all right soon. I used to keep a lot of rabbits, and I remember one of mine got hold of a drink somehow once, but it recovered all right."

Wendy came close to the rabbit and laid her hand on its head and bent and looked anxiously into its soft dark eyes.

"Poor Peter—poor, poor Peter—never mind—that swelled up feeling will go very soon——" She took it from the guest who had been kind to it with a look of gratitude, and held it against her neck. John remarked:

"It's sure to burst if you hold it so tight——"

"I think he's sighing." Wendy listened deep into the white fur.

"He's simply trying to breathe properly and you're stopping him!"

Wendy's eyes filled with tears and she turned quickly

away from John. It was horrid of him to tease when Peter wasn't well. John watched her small, sturdy form depart and was touched with compunction. "Poor old Sausage—she really *is* fussed about that animal." He sprang up and took three long strides after her and fell into step at her side: glancing down, he saw a fat tear roll over her cheek and fall on to one of Peter's ears; he put a hand on her shoulder. "Sorry, Wendy—I didn't mean to tease. I didn't realise you were really worrying——"

Wendy made a choky sound and hugged the rabbit more tightly.

John said, eyeing the animal's girth: "I'm sure he's going down again—lots of people, you know, do just swell up after meals." The statement, founded on a recollection of photographs of Indian babies in some illustrated paper, appeared to console Wendy: she sniffed and cocked an eye up sideways at him.

"Really?"

"Really!" He ventured further in his statement of what he vaguely hoped to be true, or at any rate credible. "I believe water to rabbits is like ginger-beer is to us—bloats one for a bit, that's all."

Wendy stroked the victim feverishly. "Oh, I am glad!" she looked into its face. "I really believe he *is* looking better!" They lingered now at a distance from the tennis court, and Wendy raised a glistening April countenance to her brother.

He had a glow of relief to see her consoled.

"Now you run along and put him to rest in his hutch, and if Nanny'll let you, I'll take you for a run in the car after tea—I've got to go to the station anyway to see about a parcel!"

She scuttled off and John returned toward the rest of the company. He walked slowly, his hands thrust in his trouser pockets, his shoulders a little hunched, an attitnde indicating in him some disagreeable preoccupation; he was, rarely for him, in an unamiable mood, owing to the fact that his parents had refused to allow him to depart to Dinard two days previously because "everything abroad," as his mother phrased it, "was so uncertain." He believed by this time that possibly there had been wisdom in their decision, but the acknowledgment didn't lessen a certain

chagrin at the disarrangement of his pleasant plans. He supposed vaguely "one would have to stay here," and wondered whether "the show" would be sufficiently "cleared up" for any of them to go abroad in September. He knew his father believed that England would be involved, and that the whole affair was going to be bigger than one supposed—but John disagreed—rather, at moments, against his own hopes, which were for a "really thrilling war," and was convinced that the whole business was "a scare." Colin too—they had discussed the situation the evening before—Colin was inclined to take a grim view, but then Colin was obviously influenced by father's super-pessimism: Uncle Alfred had written a week before and since then father had gone about with a last-judgment look, which the whole household, except Colin, had found somewhat exaggerated.

John sat down by his mother. The set had just ended; Cynthia firmly arranged the next: "Now you play, Captain Barrett-Saunderson—you play with Zina against your wife and John: that ought to make rather a good game!" The decree was obeyed. Edgar took up the paper, Colin looked over his shoulder. Cynthia patted the bench on either side of her.

"Sit down, my dears, and get cool." They obeyed: her clear tones were in themselves a refreshment. Edgar took her hand and continued to read the paper, heavy-browed. Colin said: "Zina's indefatigable," watching her sure serve, and tried to shake an oppression from his mind. But Cynthia was strongly aware of how events, which she herself would avoid by any mental detour, oddly overawed and unnerved these two: she affected, partly with some notion of comforting them, partly to defend herself from the infection of their apprehension, to consider their attitudes towards the European situation as dramatic, almost grotesque. She took the line, in her arguments with them, of considering them exaggerated, even absurd, treated them like Salvation Army prophets of immediate Hell, or, in moods when she had by sheer turning her back on possibilities made herself sure that none existed she talked to them with gentle, humorous reassurance, as though they were nervous children in the dark: "There *is* no bogey—

you're only imagining a bogey! This is the same nursery and furniture you know quite well! How could there be a bogey." This anyway was the tone of her admonitions.

She reverted to the subject now with a lightness whose superficiality disturbed her trust in her own equanimity.

"Hans, darling, you let your mind *dwell* on these things, truly there isn't any need to be so gloomy. After all, we aren't yet at war, and several leading articles this morning think it extremely unlikely that we *shall* be involved—I certainly do," she added with a kind of sublime sweetness that caused her husband to look at her and smile. She prolonged his smile by a little cry of encouragement.

"Hans. I will be as ridiculous, as laughable as you like, if you'll only allow me to rival 'war-scares' in your mind. And Colin!" She turned and saw him abstracted, grave—"Colin, you're letting my excellent and rather solemn husband cast a gloom over you."

Colin, who didn't, as Edgar could, discern the element of protestation, of anxiety, in her bland mockeries, met her challenge nervously.

"I am sorry if I seem rude, but we are"—his voice and look depeened, grew urgent—"we are somehow threatened. We"—he indicated themselves, the tennis players—"we're all so blindly on the threshold of something, not necessarily perhaps catastrophe, but," he broke off quickly, "changes of some kind."

Her look wavered and he realised that he had chilled her, though she still preserved her tolerant smile. He apologised with a false insouciance. "Perhaps I'm being absurd" and knew he wasn't. He thought of Edgar's remarks a week ago: "Fleas under a steam-roller," and in a fantastic humour saw John and Zina and Captain and Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson hopping like giant white fleas. He thought: "Who, even among the extravagances of amorous simile used by the Elizabethans, ever believed his lady to be a white flea?" but then one's mind was ridiculous and muddled and disorderly, one's thoughts tumbled into strange freaks like a carnival rather, clowns, devils, fairies tumbled together, ugliness and loveliness, dirt and purity all muddled up. Philosopher, Poet, Beast, all lodged in one's consciousness, fevered fancy, ideas. One

wondered occasionally what use there was in so much mental convolution? Mere dissipation? The machine driving nothing apparently, merely whirring and turning and thudding to a final stoppage; and nothing to show for it at very best but, perhaps, a few hundred printed pages on obscure bookshelves, or cunning daubs in a frame or one or two modifications of a statute book! Colin roused himself, sickened by his own sudden apprehensive lassitude. The shadow of that grotesque "steam-roller——"

Captain Barrett-Saunderson's voice was saying: "You played splendidly, partner," and Zina's answer, fresh and confident, "Yes, I'm playing quite passably to-day——" And Colin, watching her, felt a sudden sharp ache: "Zina *darling*, if you don't wake up I shall *cry*——" and for a second he stood rigid, to prevent himself from seizing her wrists and wrenching them to extort some grimace, some jerked expression of pain. The next moment, she had said good-bye to the Barrett-Saundersons, had turned to shed on him the rays of her intoxicating gaiety, and he could have knelt to kiss her hand. Edgar and Cynthia, accompanied by the guests, entered the house; John wandered off towards the garage.

"More tennis or rest, darling?"

Zina stood swinging her racquet.

"Rest, I think."

They sat down, she sighing happily in the afterglow of the game. "How well that woman plays!" she reflected.

"Mr. Barrett-Saunderson?"

"Mm," Zina nodded. "I wish I could get that forehand drive as efficiently. *His* play's good, but not so brilliant."

"I don't like him."

She was surprised, Colin didn't easily dislike on trivial grounds. "Why not, my dear?"

"A crass type of human brute."

Her look widened, she inclined to be incredulous. "He doesn't seem particularly brutal, he always seems to me just rather safe and ordinary!"

"He hasn't got a wild and soaring intellect certainly. His conversation has a sort of positive 'boringness' I find hard to endure—doesn't he bore *you*?" He saw the colour dawn more warmly in her cheeks as she became

aware that her indifference to the Captain's deficiencies, her ignorance of them, almost annoyed him. She protested.

"But, darling—I hardly ever talk to him—I—I don't really notice anyone except *you!*"

There was such blissful candour in her tones and so heady an appeal in her look that his chagrin, unaccountably aroused by her childish lack of reaction to the beings and atmosphere of the outside world was melted like frost in a glowing September morning. He looked at her now without a word and could feel the beat of his own heart, an exquisite sickening beat which checked all speech and kept him still and breathless at her side. She found words more easily and expressed some fraction of what she was feeling by whispered argument from the particular to the general.

"What an *utterly* heavenly world!"

In Colin now the Poet routed the Philosopher and the Beast, and with the whole of his being he agreed, and let his vision behold the world as her whisper had unveiled it to him; a region of fantastic beauty—of moonlit nights and rich shimmering days, of adventures in wild uplands and in strange, clamorous cities, of discoveries made in vivid, unknown lands; heights and depths of experience and always—together.

. . . . . .

Later, as he lay awake that night, this mood still persisted, the Philosopher hinted, "This is only the Beast masquerading as the Poet, you deceive yourself—or anyway the two are allied and you pretend a divergence . . . this is mawkish!" Colin turned restlessly on his pillows. How hot the night was! A creeper grew across the windows and he could watch its shadow stir on the white wall opposite. "Queer how one's moods changed." He had been almost angry with Zina because of—of her almost deliberate unreality of view, and then a look, a turn of her head, and a thrill in her voice, and the malady, the magic, whichever it was, caught him too. Could one, ought one to help envisaging some kind of pure Elysium on earth? Wasn't that almost the highest, sweetest element of being in love? Couldn't one let oneself be intoxicated by that condition, taking it as a magical flower, all fragrance

and bloom, or must one say, "These are the petals, sepals, calyx," analyse and see it steadily, not ignoring any imperfections or possible decay and mortality! Was the Philosopher the greatest lover in the end because his eye was clear and his blood cool? Must the Poet grow mad or senile in his own dreams? And the Beast dull and placid with satiated appetite?

Where was reality in an intimate relation of man and woman? An age-long question and still enduring with a query! Platonic friendships! Sooner or later desire, or lack of it, spoilt the harmonies, made them incomplete—that possibility of "something more" led to distraction, self-consciousness or, if the something more were remote, the harmonies lacked richness. Where was the savour in mere intellectual affinity, when all the senses clamoured for life? But the passions merely——? Had they more than a temporary reality? Flaring and dying fires—even, if one could rid oneself of all cant, all sentimentalism and emotional complexities—bring the relation to be purely of the senses, could that make life any more real or more free? Wouldn't one then be either too enslaved, fitfully, or else ludicrously out of sympathy?

Did it anyway get one any closer to reality to analyse, to say, "So much of my love is sensual, so much intellectual, so much community of ideals?" How far could mathematics and psychology lead them to the best kind of life together? To love Zina categorically because of the colour of her hair, and her opinion of Brahms, and her belief in Free Trade! ! !

Suddenly he envisaged her as she had looked in the garden that afternoon, lounging beside him in her white dress—and he breathed sharply and shut his eyes.

. . . . .

That same night Zina had gone to sleep early, blissfully tired. She woke once at dawn and glimpsed a sky flooded with rosy light, heard a chorused twittering in the trees and was aware of a chill in the pure sweet air: she stirred and thought drowsily of Colin and the coming day—thought, "Oh, the *loveliness* of being alive!"—and snuggled down among her pillows; then with peaceful eyelids and a smile curving one corner of her mouth, she fell asleep again.

II

THE "GREAT" WAR

"Quel est cet air si vif?" demanda Gratien.

"C'est l'hymne de la guerre contre les Marsouins," répondit le paysan. "Tout le monde le chante ici. Les petits enfants le savent avant que de parler. Nous sommes tous de bons Pingouins."

"Vous n'aimez pas les Marsouins!"

"Nous les haissons."

"Pour quelle raison les haissez vous?"

"Vous le demandez? Les Marsouins ne sont-ils pas les voisons des Pingouins?"

"Sans doute."

"Eh bien, c'est pour cela que les Pingouins haissent les Marsouins."

"Est-ce une raison?"

"Certainement . . . Vous ne savez donc pas ce que c'est le patriotisme?"

ANATOLE FRANCE (*"L'Ile des Pingouins"*).

PART TWO

I

AUGUST 18, 1914—Edgar sat in his office in Bedford Street, checking the list of Autumn publications. A typist brought in some papers, laid them on the desk, and went out again, carefully closing the door, which had PRIVATE in black letters on the opaque glass of its upper panel. The telephone bell rang through from the outer office; Edgar took up the receiver.

"Yes? Yes—I can see you to-morrow——Yes, I have made the arrangement with Carson's in New York, but naturally everything is delayed and a little uncertain just now—— No——Good-bye."

He picked up his pen again, and erased several books on the list. Printers wouldn't promise anything just now—all their staff "joining up."

A knock at the door. Wylie's (one of his clerks) silhouette outside.

"Come in."

Wylie, flushed and apologetic: "Could I speak to you a moment, Sir Edgar?"

"Certainly."

"It's only to say that I want to leave, to enlist."

There was a conflict between pride and deprecation in his voice; he blinked and fidgeted his hands in his pockets.

"Very well, Wylie—when do you go?"

Edgar thought, "Wylie a soldier—this under-nourished, genteel, warm-hearted creature."

"Will it be convenient at the end of this week, Sir Edgar?"

"Yes, perfectly." Edgar regarded him kindly. "Are you glad to go?"

"Well, it's what we're all doing, isn't it, sir—feel a bit out of it if I didn't—not as though there seems much chance of us raw recruits ever getting out there." He

grew more at his ease. "Couldn't face my wife either, somehow, if I didn't try and do my bit"—a pathetic nobility lit his genteel glance when he added, plucking at his tie, "We've all got to try and pull together these days."

Edgar, regarding the young man, noting the flush of sincerity on his dull cheeks, thought ironically, "The playing fields of Eton," and wondered how far the glamour of that superstition, the belief that cricket in a nation's youth led to victories in a nation's manhood, stimulated the players in less verdant and famous fields to adopt the spirit of the creed.

"You are quite right, Wylie—I wish you the best of luck. If you would let me know from time to time how you are progressing and how you like the life——"

"Thank you, Sir Edgar." Wylie took the proffered hand, felt a firm grasp, and went out, whistling under his breath, queerly elated.

For a moment Edgar leant his brow on his hand; the room was growing oppressive as the hot morning hours advanced; he could hear the confused distant roar of traffic in the Strand, and nearer distinct sounds in the street under his windows, the hoot of a taxi's horn, the cry of a newsvendor, the rumble of some barrow being wheeled to or from Covent Garden, and, in the next room, the incessant clicking of typewriters.

The newsboy's cry was: "Antwerp threatened."

Edgar got up, shut the window and sat down again. Suddenly an unexpected silhouette outside the door. Colin came in, greeted Edgar hurriedly.

"I've got a commission!" He was paler than usual, his manner uneven, but his look steady and direct as ever. He sat down opposite Edgar and lit a cigarette with a match whose flame quivered. Edgar had a pang of sympathy; Colin wasn't taking this easily and lightly, his imagination wouldn't let him. How much he must see and foresee and, even though dimly, apprehend. The courage of triumphing over imagination. He admired Colin's quick, gentle smile.

"Won't you congratulate me?"

"Certainly I do." So the boy was taking it outwardly

in the conventional way. "Lucky to get a commission so soon," was what the demand for congratulation implied. Edgar added: "What are your immediate plans?"

"Straight into camp, somewhere near Eastbourne, I believe that's as much as one knows." Colin was deliberately casual, keeping an almost showy rein on his nerves. He wasn't afraid, fear would anyway have been a fierce and simple feeling to deal with; physical fear didn't touch him and even the prospect of personal pain and discomfort was negligible. What dragged at his nerves obsessed him like the fear of some nightmare tide of horrors (horrible by their shadowiness and multitude—by the impossibility of wrestling with them force to force and will to will), was the perpetual query under the surface of his busy moments, of what his whole world was "in for." He couldn't, even though he so desperately apprehended toward what jagged, seared horizons the tide which bore his civilisation was setting, realise where it would land them; merely felt its gathering force, saw the lives of all those he knew and didn't know drift and turn helplessly in its power, blind to the possibility of danger or wreckage, merely a little excited and enjoying a sort of gaudy panic at the change of direction. So far his concern had been so little personal, so entirely had he been hearing with agonising sensibility the first whisperings of the tempest, that Edgar's next remark touched him with a new sharpness.

"Does Zina know?"

Colin shook his head. "I am writing her to-night. I shan't possibly get any leave for some time, it'll be simpler to write. After all,"—he tried and failed to envisage Zina's reception of the news—"after all, actually my joining is most ordinary, and it's perfectly conceivable from *her* point of view that I shan't ever have to fight! She can get used to the idea slowly."

"And from *your* point of view?"

Colin hesitated. "I think we shall go in about two months." He added gently, "Have you seen John yet this morning?"

Edgar's heavy look was interrogative. "John?"

"He said he'd be here about twelve to see you!"

The door handle was rattled, the door flung open, John stood there in a blaze of cheerfulness.

"Father! Father, I've done it!" He hurled himself down on the broad windowsill, scattering a pile of manuscripts and began to fan his heated countenance with a peculiarly exquisite handkerchief.

Edgar knew, but he summoned a heartily voiced: "Done *what?*"

John chuckled delightedly. "Gorn furra soljer, of course." He drummed his heels and panted. "God, what a hot day! I enlisted yesterday in the R.N.A.S. So, Father, your handsome son will soon be all dressed up in dark blue and gold and go flitting about the sky like a little angel."

Edgar forced a "Splendid!" and looked, with a sensation of being dazed, at this creature, with its air of cherubic elegance, leaning against the window frame. Of course, one had known, and yet hadn't yet let oneself realise, that this, John, Colin, (even the gawkily-ennobled Wylie) going—*would* come. And if he, Edgar, had avoided facing it how would Cynthia? Zina? A heaviness came on him, of responsibility, of deeper understanding. John was taking it laughing, exhilarated secretly, perhaps, with some elation of spirit which he wouldn't show; and Colin, without any exhilaration, haunted by the inexplicable futility of this dawning tragedy, was "taking" it all the same, looking forward with a sort of steady, embittered courage and a queer grimace at his own lack of humour. Edgar looked from one to the other, met their glances, John's eyes, joyous, almost impudent, Colin's green and shadowed. He asked John: "Didn't you have any trouble with your name?"

John flushed; he has secretly always resented the foreign flavour, had had a sickening moment when he feared it might stop him.

"No, I didn't, as a matter of fact. I said you'd been naturalised for years—and then the Johnny seemed to remember all about you, and grinned, and it was all perfectly all right."

He hesitated, arranged his handkerchief carefully in his breast pocket. "By the way, Father, I haven't told

mummie yet." His voice was more sober now. "I'm going down this afternoon and staying the night. I just rang up and left a message that I was, this morning." He turned to Colin. "Aren't you coming, too?"

"I can't. I'm lunching with my guardian, then I've got to see about a uniform and get to camp immediately."

"Where?"

"Somewhere near Eastbourne. I don't remember the name of the place."

"I'm destined for Chingford apparently."

Colin looked at his watch. "I must go or I shall be late for luncheon. Are you coming, John?"

John sprang up. "I'll come, walk with you as far as Pall Mall. You go to Knightsbridge, don't you? I'm lunching with a man at my club." The phrase with its aroma of worldliness (from which John sniffed a certain joy) prompted Edgar to smile, to look at John with a gleam of staid mockery, and then, suddenly, to feel a searing pity for this glad peacock strutting—he got up and put a hand on John's arm.

"John, don't let your mother think there's any chance of your having any fighting—just yet."

John nodded. "I'll be very tactful, Father." His voice was serious, but the suppressed gaiety of his look showed how he hugged the belief that he *would* fight.

Colin shook hands—again that gentle, ironical smile.

"Ach—God help you," Edgar murmured under his breath, and wondered at his own words. He heard them depart through the outer offices and down the stairs. He went to the window and watched them cross the street and stroll down towards the Strand. Some streak of superficial sentimentality prompted the thought, "That is the last time I shall see them so—out of uniform"—and he noted the familiar confident poise of John's head and Colin's easy, graceful stride. He still gazed down the street when they were out of sight, and the pavements and the buildings glared upon by the August sun seemed to him harsh and desolate.

II

The tiny clock ticked on the boudoir mantelpiece. Cynthia heard the car drive up to the front door. "It must be John." She laid down her book, and laid a marker between the pages (a strip of riband with a tulip embroidered on it by Wendy—a birthday present). John's step on the landing outside.

"Hello, Mummie!"

"John, darling!" She wondered why she should be nervous.

"I hope you didn't mind my coming back at such short notice, Mum?"

"Odd of him to apologise. Something *was* on his mind." She sat on the sofa, more than usually bland and upright, waiting, while he moved about the room, looked out of the window and made some comment on Wendy playing French cricket with Zina, sniffed at the red roses on the bureau, took up an illustrated paper and didn't look at it.

"Mummie, I've something to tell you."

"Yes?"

He came and sat down beside her, a little awkwardly.

"It's something rather—rather topping really." He could read nothing from her face save a bright encouragement.

"Tell me."

"I—I've joined the R.N.A.S."

"Oh, but, John——" She was about to say, so naturally, with all her firm sweetness: "I'm afraid it's impossible, darling!" and whatever checked the words was like the first faint touch of an icy grasp, momentary, but leaving a chillness. She merely added: "How thrilling!" and heard her own voice a shrill discord.

Her deception was a relief to them both.

"Oh, Mummie, I *am* glad you feel it is. *I* do, as you can imagine." He had lost restraint now and beamed on her, and she was thankful to feel herself still staid and smiling. He went on, as though he were heaping gifts into her lap.

"Of course, I shall have to learn all the flying business first—frightful fun—and probably I shan't actually go

out for ages" (he remembered his father's words, though from his mother's manner he judged them superfluous), "in fact I may never even *get* to France."

"No—no—of *course* not!" He didn't notice how her little breathless exclamation grasped at the possibility he had adumbrated with clumsy insincerity; and she deliberately ignored *how* clumsy it was—reassured herself, adding: "*Naturally*, they wouldn't send you," and didn't dare to pause and ask herself just why "they" shouldn't. She determined, with an inward defiance and outward calm, to ignore all panic, all silly and impossible contingencies—dealt with them, in fact, by a mental and emotional ostracism which made them seem increasingly negligible and herself more aloof from their spite. She was, to him, all affection and reasonableness.

"Well, John, tell me all about your plans——"

He told her, and she nodded and smiled in sympathy, her inward defiance growing until that alone, of her emotion, seemed alive, and the others were marionettes which she must play to deceive John just now and the others later—and finally, perhaps, convince herself of the reality of her own pantomime.

John's voice:

"I've been to Gieve's already, after lunch to-day, having a fitting to-morrow."

Her own voice: "How nice and quick." (And in her deeper consciousness the insistent "what sense in imagining? In fearing? Mere hysteria. What good would it do to let oneself be 'nervy'—merely stupid!")

She asked: "Of course, you've told your father?" (A queer inspiration, that, perhaps, if he hadn't, if no one knew, it could be all "hushed up"—she realised the grotesqueness of the notion and was unnerved.)

"Rather!"

"What did he say?"

"I think he was rather pleased."

"Oh—of course."

When he had gone, to see Nannie, Cynthia remained still; of course, John was nineteen, everyone *was* joining. But flying . . . still, the whole thing would be over by Christmas Captain Barrett-Saunderson had

said that yesterday when he came over to say good-bye he was going straight out there, regulars . . . no *chance* of John . . . how ridiculous to dream of worrying. . . ."

Wendy was in the doorway.

"Mummie?"

"Yes?"

Wendy came towards the sofa.

"May I come to tea as John's here?"

Cynthia nodded and then whispered, "Come here my sweetheart—give me a kiss." Wendy was surprised, a little mystified, and came nearer to her mother. Cynthia drew her close and with cool fingers smoothed aside the thick gold-brown fringe from the childish forehead and bent and kissed her. Wendy liked the fragrance of her mother—she sighed and rubbed her head against Cynthia's neck and murmured happily, "O-o-o, Mummie, I *do* love you."

Cynthia kissed her softly again and let her go. Wendy looked up and was puzzled, seeing a smile on her mother's lips and tears in her eyes. She stood gravely watching her.

"Mummie, are you *crying?*"

Cynthia shook her head.

"But, Mummie, you *are*—just a little."

"Now very much, Wendy."

"Why are you, Mummie?"

"Just . . . nothing."

Wendy timidly stroked her mother's hand, which lay along the arm of the sofa. "Poor Mummie!"

Cynthia suddenly laughed through her accusing tears. "Oh, you fat precious . . . run away and change that *grubby* frock."

Wendy mounted to the nursery. At the top of the nursery stairs she met John. He made an "important" face and bent and whispered in her ear. She gasped, thrilled.

"Oh, John—*really!* A real airman in an aeroplane. Will you fly here? And take me up?"

John pledged himself to "some day," and Wendy scampered off, shouting, "I must tell Nannie."

John called after her: "I've just told her," but Wendy was too excited to listen. She burst into the nursery: Nannie was sitting by the rocking horse, on whose dappled

back it was her custom to lay the pile of garments she was in process of mending. She didn't look up. "Nannie, Nannie, John's going to be an *airman*, and fight Germans in an aeroplane——" Wendy paused in gradual amazement "Was Nannie crying too?" Wendy was perplexed. Nannie looked up suddenly and her look was tearful, but somehow, Wendy felt, but couldn't explain it to herself, quite happy.

Nannie said huskily: "I know, Wendy, and we must all be very proud of him." She got up and put down the mending in her hand. "Now, my dear, you must change your frock."

That evening, when Wendy talked to Mr. Penzance, who was what is generally know as an imaginary person and who came to talk to her before she went to sleep every night, she confided to him that the grown-ups had been behaving very oddly lately. Mr. Penzance said: "That's because the days are drawing in," and when Wendy observed (in the undertones she and Mr. P. always used in case Nannie should overhear them) that Mummie had cried *and* Nannie, Mr. Penzance said, "There will be music if wet, penalty 40s." He was also of the opinion that John would probably kill a hundred million billion trillion Germans.

. . . . .

Zina got Colin's letter the following morning. John hadn't, by Colin's request, told her what its contents were likely to be—merely that he had seen him and that she would hear from him the next day.

. . . 'Soon, darling, you will get used to every man you know being a soldier—and I only didn't tell you beforehand that of course I should join, as you might have felt it was a grim matter of decision, whereas its really quite obvious I shall be in England for an indefinite time still, so you may think of me doing a little drill every day and sleeping in a tent, acquiring a truly military tone and a perpetually increasing diaphram. Above all, as soon as I can get leave (this is the important part of my letter) we must be married. I am writing to your mother about it, and

I know your father will feel it to be reasonable. I shall try and arrange to have leave in October, there isn't a chance before then. As it was to have been October anyway I see no reason why a "state of war" should make us procrastinate, on the contrary, Zina, my darling, the world is going mad, London is turning khaki as though an autumn blight were upon it (already I am "turning at the edges," as it were, i.e. I have got my puttees and cap). It's heavenly to think of you at Pelham, so sweet and sane and happy—so utterly in contrast to this stifling war-mad city. Perhaps you will be able to come down and see me in camp next week. Couldn't you and your mother motor down? And then we can discuss "plans." One relief, we shall be quit of much irritating ceremony—lace and gardenias. Dearest, write to me at once.'

He added his address.

His mentality, even by letter, was sufficiently dominant, made it all seem really quite obvious—queer, all the same! Two days ago he had been here in this room—she glanced round the library as though its furniture and mellow tapestries might speak to her and elucidate somehow this perplexity—he hadn't said anything even about the war in general, merely been rather quiet. In the evening he had read to her "The Ring and the Book"—"Caponsachi's Defence" that she loved—and when he said good-night he had been oppressed and singularly undemonstrative. But then she hadn't thought anything of it since he *had* these moods, for which she could love him more because they woke in her a bewildered pity. She thought, returning to the letter, "Of course there is nothing dreadful about it, only surprising—getting used to war conditions—queer. Colin and John. Perhaps one could almost agree with Wendy that it was exciting, perhaps. Of course they would get married in October—the war might be over by then—anyway by Christmas—Mummie had said that several times last night, and after all *Mummie* was cheerful enough apparently—and she would realise it if there were anything to worry about.' Zina sat down at the writing-table, humming vaguely; she would answer at once.

'Of course it's the right thing for you to do, and you mustn't think, Colin darling, that I should be so silly as to adopt any other line about it—what is difficult to get used to is the whole idea of being at war—but I am not upset about you, dearest, only a little miserable at your being away and having to go to camp *at once*. But I am going to *insist* on Mummie and me going down to see you next week. How funny you will seem in uniform . . . it *is* difficult to believe it, you know—everything is so absolutely the same here as it was "before the war," except that the river is going down rather with the heat and it's almost unsafe to dive. Why should there be *any* difficulty about our getting married? You write as if there just *might* be. Of *course* we will, darling. Darling, I wish though you weren't away. I hope you will miss me when you're "in camp"—only, of course, not enough for it to hurt you, only enough for you to be specially glad to see me again. Next week seems *æons* away. . . . The newspapers don't seem real to me—it's so like melodrama, and pretty grim melodrama just now—but once we get all our regular troops out there——

'I typed out several of your poems for you yesterday, I *do* love the one about the cypress trees that you sent me from Italy, and the one you wrote last winter on that sketch of a woman's hand by Leonardo that we saw at Windsor. Father thinks the latter the best thing you've done. He says you have managed to create an atmosphere of the "patina" of time plus the "timelessness" of genius which such a subject conveys. And, you know, he doesn't praise easily and is always absolutely sincere. I shall write to you every day until next week, as otherwise I don't know *how* the time will pass. Colin darling, I do hate your being away—but it *can't*, it *can't* be for long—I believe this war must be merely a damned silly dream. Anyway I shall treat it like that and just wait to wake up—to you. You see, beloved, nothing is *quite, quite* real to me *except* you. I wonder what I did in all the years before you "happened" to me—nineteen silly years! That's why I grudge you to your absurd camp. However it just CAN'T last! I expect by next Spring we shall look back and think how absurd one

was to mind—I expect this is really just a little liquorice to make the jam taste nicer! And it isn't "like the Spartan boy," as Wendy would say, to make a grimace about it!'

III

Colin's regiment was ordered to France at the end of September and it was decided that he and Zina should be married on his next leave. She wouldn't go to the station to "see him off," saw him instead at his guardian's house in Lowndes Street.

Her taxi drew up at the door in a wet, leaden dusk: she felt sick and frightened; horrified of being afraid, tremulously determined to show equanimity.

"Has Mr. Russell arrived yet?" The maid took her umbrella.

"He's upstairs in the drawing-room, Miss."

Zina gave a sidelong glance at a "British Warm" flung over a chair in the hall.

"All right, I'll go up by myself." She shivered, held her head higher. The drawing-room door was ajar, and she glimpsed a khaki figure against the mantelpiece.

"Colin!" she whispered; the room was chill in the twilight, hardly a glow from the fire, which had sunk low in the open hearth. She stepped forward, tried to smile ("something she had meant to say—something easy—cheerful?——"). She was silent and shivered.

He took her two hands and drew her towards him. "Sweetheart, you're cold."

She nodded; he drew an armchair up to the hearth, made her sit down, and, kneeling beside her, took her hands again and kissed them.

She sat silent, staring over his bent head. The gas lamps in the street cast a greenish glare upward on the houses opposite (those windows were like dark blank eyes in a white face!). She wished her heart wouldn't beat so hard and quickly—it stifled one.

He murmured, "Darling, you mustn't be unhappy." He was astounded, his sympathy wrenched by this change in her. Even ten days ago when he had seen her, she had been perfectly cheerful, hadn't seemed to admit any need for fear; her sweet, trusting immunity from the

general panic, her proud refutation of any need to worry, had been a relief to him, especially for her sake, though it had left him with a vague dissatisfaction, a longing that she should feel the reality of the situation a little more. Now she was real enough—heavy-eyed and terribly quiet.

"Zina—why?—suddenly?"

She slipped one arm round his neck, her other hand sought his and held it hard; she spoke disjointedly:

"I didn't realise till yesterday, really. I didn't believe in its realness. It felt before as if—as if it was all just talk and pretence, quite irrelevant. I can't absolutely believe it now—that, that you're going 'out there,' Colin!" He could feel how rigidly she held herself; a flicker from the fire lit up her face, touched a gleam of her hair.

"Take off your hat, darling." She obeyed, flinging it on the floor beside her chair. He had never seen her before bereft of her glow and sparkle, and she seemed in a way infinitely more lovely, more terribly lovable. Kneeling up, he kissed her mouth, and she shuddered and held closer to him.

"Oh, Colin, must you go?"

"Hush, darling——"

"Colin, you'll be *dreadfully* careful."

He strangled an absurd desire to weep at the words, and couldn't answer them. She urged in a tense, imploring whisper:

"And you'll come back, and it'll be all over quite soon?" She was like a child in her abject longing to trust any rejection of her fears and yet, with pathetic grandeur, a woman in her control of voice and movement.

"Of course I shall, my dear, of *course* I shall." His face in the dusk seemed that of an archangel drowning in shadows, her voice broke on a sob:

"Kiss me again——"

Feeling herself in his arms, some protestation of her whole being refused to acknowledge what she so glaringly knew, that in half-an-hour he would be gone, that she would be alone, and he, toward his incredible destination.

"Zina, my darling, you *mustn't* mind like this. Darling, darling." His voice was unsteady, and he held her now as though some force were trying to tear her from him. Her control was going, but she didn't cry, merely shuddered with long breathless sobs and let him hold her with some desperate sense that together they might resist this incredible future. He muttered, feverishly desiring to comfort her and yet assailed himself by such torture at leaving her that he could hardly speak.

"Listen, my dearest, we know it's going to be all right, there is nothing really to be afraid of, it's only leaving each other for a little while—Zina—Zina, darling!"

She could taste his hot tears on her mouth.

The room was dark now, the fire almost dead, only the windows showed like tall pale frames lit from the lamps in the street. Suddenly a clock in the corner of the room creaked and chimed six. For a moment they were silent as though hypnotised.

"I must go, my dear." He released her harshly, sprang to his feet.

She got up dazed, groping.

"Switch on the light." She was regaining control, urging herself now to let him go bravely. He found the switch, and in the sudden light each was taut to present some sort of courage of countenance, to hide by any sort of mask a too wretched impression of what they felt. He even half smiled, but his look held hers in a prolonged, defiant agony. She stood upright, holding on to the mantelpiece, said in cold syllables, her eyes dark and heavy with pain:

"Colin, it's as if my soul were being dragged from my body." His face looked so queerly rigid—with the stains of tears on his cheeks.

A knock at the door.

"Your taxi's here, sir."

"All right. Thank you, Roberts. I'm just coming."

The maid departed.

Now he approached her again, infinitely gentle: "Dearest, beloved—*believe*, *believe* it's going to be all right." His lips touched her forehead. "Believe it, darling," he whispered again and then turned abruptly,

leaving her wide-eyed and silent in the chilly drawing-room.

. . . . .

His first long letter reached her at Pelham Court a week later; he said little of the actual fighting.

'I'm rather glad your war-work is going to be working in the gardens at Pelham instead of hospitals—I'd rather think of you out of doors—but DON'T, for goodness' sake, turn those heavenly lawns into potato fields! There is enough massacre going on. One can put up with one's own little discomforts as "experience," but what haunts one is that I believe this war is all happening for *nothing* essentially. I mean there's no end to be gained that's either good or beautiful—of course, this actual war is unavoidable, because, as your father said to me towards the end of July, one evening: "People alive now all over the world are the victims of the mistakes made by hundreds of preceding generations," "atonement" was the word he used. Perhaps he's right. War is a sort of crucifixion to atone for the political sins of the past. But will the future allow itself to be "saved?" I suppose not. This blind humdrum ugliness of war—all taken as a matter of course so easily. It's the negative of all the qualities that make civilisation, beauty, sensitiveness, kindness. Where can there be any good in this orgy of scientifically refined bestiality? Men's brains used to destroy and torture one another's bodies! All this, of course, is rather in the abstract, dearest, as I am in a particularly safe part of the line, where we seem likely to remain. Dearest, we must both be sensible and look forward to my leave, which ought to be in the Spring. Will you think it funny when I say that you can't imagine how I love to think (when it's all so filthy out here) that you should sleep with your head on a cool white pillow every night, and wake in the morning in that panelled, deep-windowed room, and look out over the garden at the woods turning red and gold (as they must be just now), and at the blue misty ridges of the Berkshire Downs in the distance. How is Wendy's rabbit? Keeping off

the drink, I hope. You say John supposes he may get out after Christmas. He's one of the people who really seems to enjoy his job. I wish it weren't flying, but, as you say, perhaps after Christmas all will be finished. I'd love some records out here, one wearies of "Tipperary" as almost unmitigated musical diet! Your mother wrote me a most charming letter; she's astonishingly convinced still that one shouldn't take the war more seriously than is one's duty. I rather suspect her high, cheerful tone though. Be as sweet to her as you can, dearest. Zina, why should I scribble on this grubby piece of writing paper that I love you and that all I long for is to be with you again, my dearest? And yet one always *does* try to say something of what can't really be said, only felt, like an aching of one's soul, and mind and body. Zina, my *darling*. . . .'

IV

An afternoon, March, 1915. Zina came in, muddy and tired from the garden. She looked anxiously on the hall table for letters; nothing, except a bill for those bulbs she had had in the Autumn. She found her mother in the library. Cynthia's voice had grown sharp lately, though her manner was as bland as ever.

"Have you changed your muddy boots, Zina?"

Zina nodded and sank down in an armchair.

"I wish you wouldn't sit about in your smock and breeches, darling."

"Sorry, Mummie—I'm just going up. Is Daddy coming down this evening?"

"He came down by the early train to-day—he's in the study." Cynthia inspected her knitting closely. "I'm sure the regulation pattern for Balaclava helmets is too large in the neck."

Zina said, watching her mother: "You look tired, Mummie darling."

"I'm not at all—it must be the light." Cynthia spoke almost brusquely. She had expected a letter from John to-day, who was stationed at Dunkirk. The afternoon post had been, and no letter. She went on with her knitting. "Miss Grimmer came to see me this afternoon."

There was a hint of amusement now in her voice. Miss Grimmer was tacitly acknowledged in the family to be a joke, though, by Nannie's request, restraint was shown before Wendy on this subject.

Zina smiled.

"What has Miss G. to say?"

"Oh, a considerable amount as ever. First, a great deal about flannel and the Red Cross; then, what did I think of her brother's course of war sermons that he began last Sunday (I pretended that I'd been sufficiently impressed). Then, did I think Sir Edgar would like to give a stained glass window as a thankoffering. I said: 'For what, quite, Miss Grimmer?' and the creature coughed and shifted those beady eyes of hers, and I finally drew from her the fact that Sir Edgar is expected by the vicarage to wish to give public thanks for being naturalised, and so secure as an English citizen. Rather monstrous cheek! I pointed out that my husband and I were both engaged just now in arranging for this place to become a hospital, and that he had, moreover, a distinct prejudice against modern stained glass."

Cynthia was annoyed, and some of her vivacity, rare in these days, came back as she spoke. "And the woman actually was silly enough to mutter that the Vicar wouldn't mind if the glass weren't 'quite new.' Then I simply said, 'I'm afraid, Miss Grimmer, he won't give you anything more satisfactory than gelantine inlaid with cough pastilles,' at which she made a snuffly noise not much like a laugh, but she meant me to think she was seeing my joke."

Zina laughed. "She *is* astonishing. She does all the sort of things her type do in plays—wears goloshes and black spats and 'spencers,' and disapproves of everybody."

"She also told me though a rather dreadful piece of news."

"What?"

"About the Barrett-Saundersons."

"Why—what's happened?"

"She's apparently left him (you know he's been out in France since August) and she moved up to London and was doing canteen work there. Now she's living with another

man whom she met quite lately, and wants her husband to divorce her."

"How curious—and sudden. How on earth did Miss Grimmer know, though?"

"Apparently the Captain came home on leave last week and came down to their house and had all her belongings, furniture, clothes, pictures, everything, packed up and sent to her in London. Miss Grimmer caught sight of him at the station. I'm so sorry for him. I'm not really surprised at *her* though—she always gave one the impression of being . . . not quite honourable."

"But she may care terribly for the other man—and have made a mistake in her marriage."

"Nevertheless, it's *her* mistake and she ought to abide by her contract. I don't understand that sort of behaviour in decently bred women—it puts them on a par with demi-mondaines, as though there were no such thing as a sense of duty and responsibility."

"But they have no children, Mummie—and if they don't get on——"

"I believe not getting on is largely a matter of self-indulgence, and an excuse for ridding oneself of responsibility."

"Yes; but, Mummie, I do think you judge harshly, just because yours and father's marriage is such a success."

Cynthia's look softened. "Your father's a darling, Zina." But she wouldn't relax her general judgment. "Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson is the sort of woman who cultivates secret unhappiness and rebellion, as an added attraction."

"But she may have reason to be unhappy, though he seems quite nice always."

Cynthia disagreed with her daughter's tolerance, rather resented it.

"He's obviously particularly nice and good-looking and popular."

"But he may not be 'sympathique.'"

"Fine shades! That sort of attitude's an emotional luxury."

"But luxury and civilisation are often synonymous."

"Not always the uncivilised take to luxury, and with exaggeration."

"I don't champion *her* particularly, Mummie—because he *is* nice, I think; but in general I don't see the good of going on with a marriage when husband and wife don't love one another."

"But don't you see, Zina, that such a creed makes married life more and more easily broken up?"

But Zina urged: "Mummie, *do* try and see what I mean with an open mind: I don't think it right to take such a relation lightly and to separate easily, only I do feel that there are cases when it's better, morally, I mean, to repair such a mistake by separation. Or supposing, perhaps, Mummie, she may never have known what it was like to be in love before. Daddy said he believes it was a sort of *mariage de convenance*—and then she met this man, who's probably going to the Front. And in the stress of war how could anything else in the world matter to her!" Zina was eloquent—she thought how little anything mattered to her now except Colin's safety, Colin's happiness; sometimes she was ashamed that John's danger, her mother's anxiety, though heavily in the atmosphere for her, should oppress her so lightly by comparison.

There was that sharp note in Cynthia's comment: "Stress of war! An excuse for anything! There's the telephone. I expect your father'll answer it."

Zina got up wearily. "My back aches with digging."

Cynthia regarded her anxiously." You mustn't overdo it."

Zina said listlessly, "Oh, I prefer to be tired out, one sleeps well then. I'm going up to have a bath and change. When are the 'convalescents' going to begin to come down?"

"The first twelve come next week, and a Red Cross nurse."

"I wish it weren't officers."

"Why? It would be much more difficult, with the servants, and meals, and so forth, if we had 'Tommies.'"

"I suppose so," Zina sauntered out into the hall, closing the library door behind her. She was half-way upstairs when she heard her father's voice from the study.

"Zina!"

"Yes, Daddy?"

A pause. "Will you come here?"

She redescended—the study door was half-open—she went in. Her father was standing as though he had just turned away from the telephone; his face had never looked so before—he seemed to see her with a clear, heartrending glance, yet hardly to see her as herself at all.

He held out a hand: she apprehended already what he must say, stared at him, waiting.

"Zina, Colin's guardian has just telephoned to me——" he paused, feeling her hand lifeless in his grasp.

"Go on."

"He has just had a telegram from the War Office——"

"Go on, Daddy—GO ON."

"Missing . . . believed killed——"

She gave a little icy inclination of the head; her tone was impersonal, her words seemed to her thin and far away:

"So that's all?"

"Yes, my dear." He didn't stir; they stood as though by their least movement the silence that bound them would be shattered. She appeared to him absolutely composed and frigid, hardly real. A long silence, her hand still in his: then three more of her little clipped words:

"How very queer."

When he pressed her fingers she drew them away and stood alone, her thumbs thrust through her leather belt, her gaze bent on some bleak infinity. She repeated "believed killed" politely, without shifting glance or position. He suffered in his awful inability to help her, ventured at last:

"Zina?"

She shook her head, then turned on her heel and walked out—and he sank down in a chair, pressing his palms to his forehead.

"Ach Gott—this war . . . these pitiful, tortured children."

. . . . .

Zina went to her room; mechanically she took off her muddy clothes, put on a dressing-gown. Then she took

Colin's photograph off the table, took his letters massed in a drawer in her bureau, moving precisely about the room, piled them on to the crackling log fire. She stared into the flames. In her numbed mind there sprang a fanatical hope that these flames were scorching the last remnants of what "had been" . . . a funeral pyre of happiness. With another part of her mind she thought, "I can't be quite sane to do this, it's mad—dramatic——" Her feelings dizzied her thoughts—and she heard herself moaning under her breath, over and over again, "I don't understand . . . I don't understand . . . I don't *understand*," then she added blankly, "Missing—believed killed" . . . and then whispered again, "Colin—*Colin, I don't understand.*"

. . . . .

Cynthia came up and found her sitting on the bed; she was appalled by her same cold look—Cynthia herself was trembling from head to foot, forcing back her tears; she sat down on the bed beside her and tried to put her arms round her. Zina shrank away. "No—*no!*" She didn't want any human contact, its imminence gave her a sort of panic; she held up her hand in a little stiff gesture of defence.

"*Please*, Mummie"—if only her mother wouldn't be so upset, when there wasn't any *use* any more—"Mummie, do please be calm." Zina's icy, exhausted voice.

Cynthia had a haunted look, she spoke despairingly. "Can't I *help* you?"

"No, Mummie—there isn't any help" (if only her mother would be silent . . . go away).

"Zina—we must try and believe—that perhaps——" "Try and believe"—that's what "he" had said—that last time at Lowndes Street—"try and believe." Zina thought, turning a cold look on her mother, "Can one suffer *more* than this. Is there any more to feel?"

Now their glances met, Zina's strange, almost cruel, and in Cynthia's blue eyes an expression of sheer terror. And then Zina understood—and felt for her mother a remote pity, and heard herself saying what, in the flash when their glances met, had been starkly, though distantly, vivid to her:

"Poor Mummie, you're trying so hard to be sorry for me, and all the time you're terrified about John, and you're so ashamed of being relieved that it was Colin—and not John!" Zina ignored the gasped remonstrance, the shuddering "It's not true."

"Yes, Mummie, it is, I know. You can't help it, neither of us can. There's just—all that—between us."

A smile touched her lips for a second, like a trick of moonlight on a frozen landscape.

"I'm sorry, Mummie."

Cynthia had risen, stood above her now, muttered helplessly with a fierce, agonised look:

"I don't understand you."

Zina shook her head: "Please leave me——"

Cynthia turned to the door and went out.

Zina remained unmoving on the bed, thoughts dragging through her mind, inconsequent, spasmodic. "Now it had happened, quite differently from the way one had thought—quite calmly (how the logs hissed and crackled), and now there was nothing left, nothing, nothing at all, just blank darkness. One didn't dare take the whole horror of it, think it out in detail. Colin hurt, wounded. No, NO, Colin's greenish eyes looking up at you through all those thick, suffocating shadows. Colin hurt, killed. That meant nothing—'killed'—only that one wouldn't, that he wouldn't come back—ever. It was like some horror clutching one by the throat.

"Nothing left now that mattered, now that Colin, just blankness, going on and on, was anything real any more? past or future? (there was the dressing gong!) was it real that they had loved one another? and laughed such a lot?—and had funny picnics in the sun?—and walked together with the rain stinging their face?—all the things that might have been, that they might have done. No use now, facing all that, just oblivion left. Colin was gone and all goodness and loveliness, that was finished. No use thinking about it, and the rest of life must be filled up somehow."

She seemed to feel in herself two forces at war—spirits of fire and ice fighting for possession. The awful pain of letting the truth burn and illumine one's whole soul? Or

the easier desperate abandon to the freezing power of oblivion? How could one dare to think and love and remember, when every thought scorched one's blood, and memories were like flames to torture one? Wasn't it better to look away and deliberately forget, feeling only an icy aching, a dull, numbing pain which was anyway more bearable——?

Queerly a fragment of—of "his" beloved Meredith beat in her mind:

And if I drink oblivion of a day
So shorten I the stature of my soul.

. . . She moaned under her breath: "I can't—one *must* forget. What good can I do by not trying to forget, when it's all over?" She protested against a suspicion of her own cowardice—"I can't—I can't—Colin, I *must forget*——"

The spirit of ice possessed her.

V

October, 1917. Wendy's second Autumn term at Leckenham.

A home perpetually filled with convalescent officers, who were ready to tease her, flatter her dawning vanity, laugh her into pertness of manner, wasn't considered, by the joint conference of Nanny, Cynthia and Edgar, to be "suitable," or conducive to regular work. Wendy at school felt herself to be a success. In her house she was popular among her contemporaries, having a tolerable wit and generous manner (she could be immensely friendly without being involved in any of the duller obligations of friendliness, such as hearing people their Latin verbs or helping to wind wool—all knitting power being in spare moments devoted to khaki socks and khaki mufflers). She was liked by the seniors in her house for a certain spacious deference of manner, a grave way she had of hearing their dicta, her blue eyes inscrutable and observant. They approved, too, of her healthy prettiness; at thirteen-and-a-half Wendy was no longer fat, but moved well and had a faculty for games and enough athletic ambition to counteract an instinctive laziness. In "Col-

lege" eight hundred girls from the different boarding-houses met daily in ugly but spacious architectural surroundings to benefit by every complexity of first-rate teaching and by a certain amount of less modern Anglican ritual (which haunted this progressive atmosphere and was like a poor "Zeitgeist" not "laid" with its generation). Here Wendy's quickness of brain combined with a mulish refusal to work at whatever subject bored her, made her sufficiently remarked by her teachers and subjected to alternations of praise and blame which she found stimulating. If, at this time, Wendy had a dominating characteristic it was dislike and avoidance of boredom, which Nanny, at home, condemned in another form, protesting that Wendy was "never peaceful and always looking for diversions"; and Cynthia too complained that Wendy was restless, and ignored her husband's query, "Is there much rest in the air that the child breathes, and that *all* her contemporaries grow in?"

This autumn term Wendy was glad to be back at school, enjoyed her more assured position in the house, liked the mistress of her form—a witty creature with blunt features and exquisite ankles and a husky, hesitating voice.

. . . . .

This particular mistress was going through their English essays. Wendy lounged, bit her pen, fidgeted with her pencil-box, smiled occasionally at the comments on the essays.

"Yours is good in manner and intention, Wendy, but there isn't sufficient matter to it! You set out to prove, which is probably true, that Hamlet was an interesting and charming young man whose life was distorted by two weak, hysterical women—his mother and Ophelia, but you run away with your own dialectics and don't acknowledge the authority of Shakespeare sufficiently."

Wendy leant forward on her desk:

"I suppose so. Ophelia *was* a mug though—wasn't she?"

"The epithet isn't very expressive."

Wendy flushed at the mockery in the husky voice, and amplified her statement in self-defence:

"Well, she never came up to scratch when Hamlet

needed her; she let her dreary old father put her against him."

"One isn't enchanted by Polonius' platitudes, certainly," the blunt, humorous face was turned to the whole class. "What I don't make out from *any* of your essays is just what you consider to be the 'tragedy' of Hamlet?" The tone was interrogative.

Someone volunteered, "That everybody was killed in the end!" A placid voice, "That the Queen was unfaithful to the memory of her first husband."

Wendy volunteered: "I think I said in my essay that Hamlet was living in the wrong sort of 'set,' and he got mixed up in all this 'revenging' when it wasn't really his nature, and no one understood what was wrong with him. . . . "

Wendy emphasised her words with a little eager gesture of entreaty.

"I think Wendy's got nearest the truth, that tragedy isn't essentially an event, but nearly always comes from disharmony between character and circumstance."

The placid voice, hurt: "I don't see. . . . "

"Well, to be more personal. Hamlet was too civilised for his circumstances. . . ."

The door of the class-room was opened, one of the secretaries of the "Principal." (Not "Headmistress," the position being more than mere mundane headship, having an aroma of spiritual pomp, so that it was dimly felt that though not crudely God's vicar in Leckenham—such an assumption being too blatant and "Romish"—"the Principal" had, ex-officio, a measure of divine sanction.)

"Miss Pilgrim would like to see Wendy Renner."

Wendy, leaving the class in a mild condition of speculation, followed the secretary through vistas of corridor, arched by polished light oak, and pavemented with black and white marble squares, up the shallow, beeswaxed staircase toward the Principal's private offices. The secretary preserved by instinct a silence which for Wendy, and all those having the elaborated status of pupil, was compulsory. Wendy reflected, left to wait in an anteroom, on the possible reason of this summons from Olympus. Her recent sins had been too venial to warrant the descent

of high wrath, but she could guess at no other causes, unless it were on account of her steady and indifferent refusal of all suggestions that she should attend confirmation classes. She wasn't at all nervous at the prospect of the interview, whatever its cause; rather prided herself on a sangfroid which she knew was rare in her predicament, a certain fear of the "Principal" being tacitly a convention.

Wendy pulled up her stockings and readjusted the brooch which pinned her green and scarlet House tie: it was an R.N.A.S. gold "spread eagle" brooch, given her by John nearly three years ago, the first Christmas of the War, before he went to France.

"Miss Pilgrim will see you now."

Wendy went in.

"Wendy, come here." The golden voice with a curious break in it that Wendy had heard so often, reading prayers in the Hall, addressing the College at the end of the term, making some announcement from the platform. She became aware of a quite beautiful sympathy in the atmosphere, in this deep blue room, lit by vases of yellow and copper chrysanthemums, a sympathy emanating somehow from that voice and presence, and assailing her like wafts of an anæsthetic, giving her more and more a swimming sensation, making her gradually stiflingly afraid, and yet fascinated, as though she were being heavily and sweetly throttled.

She sat and listened:

"A letter from your father—try and take it bravely," then came the sudden grip, sharper and more ferocious for being held back—the golden voice enunciated the words like a desperate blessing, breaking to a whisper on the final words:

" . . . Your brother was killed three days ago." And then more words: "Your father thinks it better for you *not* to go home, but to stay on here. The aeroplane had come down. He was trying to save his pilot's life by getting him into the French trenches."

More and more words, beautiful in tone, seeming to mean nothing.

"Pray for strength . . . remember that God is good. . . ."

A rage possessed Wendy; she choked savagely, blind with tears:

"How can God be *good* when he lets John be killed? How can God be anything but——?"

There was some deep compassionate tolerance in the reply; but to Wendy it was all distant sounds, far beyond her own fury and misery and disillusion.

VI

The end of July, 1918. Edgar crossed Lower Regent Street and walked up towards Piccadilly. He had just left a Red Cross Committee to fulfil an assignation with Wendy for luncheon. She had come up from Leckenham, term being over the previous day, and he had promised to take her to a matinee before she went down to Pelham that evening.

He walked slowly, feeling the glare beat up from the pavements; he had relaxed, in the last few years, his disciplined carriage; his shoulders were held less squarely and his glance, surveying the people passing him, had lost much of its benign equanimity; rather seemed to search them sadly one by one, comprehend for a second their fleeting beings, and let them go again. The news posters stared at him at the doors of the Piccadilly Hotel: "Gallant Attacks by Americans;" "General Mangin's Success." A pretty girl in a W.A.A.C.'s uniform strode out of the doors, followed by a staff officer: they were both laughing. Two wounded Tommies, in their sky-blue suits and scarlet ties, stopped to buy a paper; one of them said:

"Seem to be gettin' a move on now."

Edgar heard the other say something about "Yanks" and "a bit earlier."

At the corner of Bond Street an old man was selling roses; a midshipman, tall, eager, smiling, was buying some for a girl in a mauve dress, pressing a huge bunch into her gloved hand.

Amid the abundance of khaki, men strolling in couples, women accompanied by khaki escorts, cars and taxis filled with cheerful spruce creatures in khaki, Edgar remembered, with a sense of something incredibly remote, a sense of a world actual only in memory, vivid in past aeons and

now ashily buried, the London of top-hats and morning coats. It touched him as humorous that the remembrance of that musical-comedy panoply could give him such a sharp pang—that grey trousers and those glossy, tilted hats should assume for him all the pathos of evidences of a buried world. He thought, "But of course it'll come back; some of it," and wondered just which elements of that past civilisation would persist: the better or worse? Its frivolities? or such dignities as it had still held precious as relics of slower, more spacious ages?

Wendy was waiting for him at Claridges.

"At last, Daddy!"

He thought she looked precociously, almost absurdly, smart in her pale dress and drooping hat. Her hair was "bobbed" (she had cut it in imitation of Zina, who in her gardening out-of-door work had found her heavy hair a burden). She might have been seventeen, eighteen from her manner and appearance, certainly more than her actual fourteen-and-a-half years.

Watching her as she glanced down the menu, Edgar thought how oddly, in a way, she was like Cynthia; in colouring, in the widely-set blue eyes and long, slim neck, and yet how unlike essentially to what Cynthia had been. Wendy, even this young precocious Wendy, with her shifting values of existence, her intense pre-occupation with the surface of life, her, anyway outwardly, cynical treatment of any further depths, lacked the essential vivacity, the generous, laughing attack on life which Cynthia, as a girl, so adorably had, and which Zina also had shown in some degree—before the war. Even in small things, in the cakes she wanted sent to school, in her frocks—in any of her diversions, Wendy was so quaintly greedy of pleasure, so utterly indifferent to any larger notions of happiness.

"Homard à l'Américain, and then chicken, and . . . oh, well, I'll decide later on."

Wendy laid her gloves and bag down on the table, and smiled at her father.

"I hope you remembered the tickets!"

Edgar produced an envelope. "Here they are. I should not have dared to face 'votre Majesté' without them. You look well."

"That's lots of tennis, I expect—I'm in my house six, you know—did mummie tell you?"

Edgar congratulated her. She continued, fixing a critical glance on the lobster as it was brought toward their table,

"My freckles are beastly enough. I've tried cucumber and lemon and milk and all sorts of things. Oh, I do love claws!"

"They suit you, I think—otherwise, you would look altogether too sophisticated."

"D'you mean claws or freckles, darling?"

Edgar laughed, glancing at her extravagantly-pointed nails.

"I wonder you can play the piano."

"Oh, well—I always stop playing ten days before the holidays, so as to let them get a respectable length——" she broke off. "How's the family?"

Edgar raised his eyebrows and the graver look returned to his features.

"Your mother still doesn't sleep very well, but I think that is a little better. Zina is very thin, she works so hard, and then, I think, she does not eat enough. When one does all that work out of doors—even Edward" (he referred to the solitary gardener's boy left on the estate) "was conscripted in May."

"Has Captain Barrett-Saunderson been coming over a lot lately? Last holidays he started coming a lot, ever since he was invalided out!"

"You mean that you think he wants to marry Zina."

Wendy said coolly: "I thought it was becoming pretty obvious. I saw his former wife in the hall here just now—that's what made me think of it."

"How was she looking?"

"Oh, *very* alluring—rather like a 'demmy' though."

"A what?"

"Demi-mondaine, darling. You may have the good old English word if you like."

"I do not; also I dislike you to speak in that way of any woman."

"But, Daddy, my dear, I only say what I *think*."

"All the same it is a pity that you should deal in such terms."

Wendy grimaced and drank some hock-cup. "Daddy, you are a little absurd!"

Edgar's look held a glimmer of humour.

"Now, tell me, do you think that Zina will marry him?"

"She's so queer, one never knows. She never tells a chap what she feels. She doesn't *dis*courage him!"

"But I don't think she particularly encourages him either. She seems to me indifferent in the whole matter. Your mother doesn't seem either to know what she thinks."

There was a pause, then Wendy said curtly:

"It's since—Colin—that Zina's changed."

Edgar winced at her queer, hard tone; this "child" never avoided a topic or a fact, almost vulgarly refused ever to appear embarrassed or hurt. And yet her emotional and intellectual reactions weren't, he knew, either dull, or blurred by lack of perception; rather, there was a clear, steely element in her reflections of what she understood, a singular absence of what Edgar, at this moment, vaguely identified to himself as "illusion." Wendy added, with what he perceived as a curious calm cruelty to herself; "Last time I came here was on John's last leave——"

("Yes, raspberries, please—I suppose one *can't* get cream?") "He said I was getting to dance rather well." She avoided her father's glance—"It *does* seem ages ago."

Edgar thought, "Was I wrong to leave her at school after the news? Ought I to have let her come home?" At the time the decision had seemed best—to keep her away from home—with Cynthia's illness and the whole too insistently silent, tragic atmosphere. And she had come home for the Christmas holidays to avoid, as far as possible, any intimate relation with her family and shield herself by prolonged and tedious "ragging" with the "convalescents"—and this casual insouciance. He could understand her now, as she sat idly watching the people at the neighbouring tables, pleased by the occasional glances at herself, and referring to "the last time" she had been there—with John; he could realise how she was hurting herself, cherishing a distorted pride that no one should think she "cared much," and yet it seemed to him

unbearable that she should indulge, even as a protection, in this harshness.

"Wendy?"

"Yes, Daddy?" Her look was almost too naïve, too innocent of any response to his understanding: he realised how she avoided his sympathy, lest its touch should shatter her whole elaborately constructed equanimity. She repeated:

"Yes, Daddy?"

But he couldn't now, in these surroundings, go on, and was even conscious of a certain tricky strength in her pose; he merely said, leaning back and pushing away his glass:

"Darling child, it is good to see you again."

She sighed, "It's rather lovely to be back," then smiled. She had an elusive smile which dawned in her eyes and scarcely touched her lips at all; she added purposefully:

"When may I leave school?"

He teased: "Mon enfant—you aren't fifteen until the autumn."

"Can I leave when I'm sixteen?"

He shook his head. "That is much too young. Besides, I thought you wished to go to Oxford, and you have your examinations to pass."

"Oh, well, I don't think I do, after all, want to go to College—exams. are such a bore!"

"Last holidays nothing else would please you."

Wendy made a little gesture of impatience. "Last holidays! Now I think I'd rather enjoy myself."

"If you are only half-educated, you will soon find there is so very little of yourself to enjoy. You have too much intellect, my child—you would quickly bore yourself."

"Perhaps, but I don't want to stay at school another three years, it's so dull, such a lot of it—not the work, I mean, but so many of the girls."

Edgar regarded her quizzically. "It is not really the mark of a distinguished mind to find others dull."

Her heightened colour admitted his thrust.

"All the same, Daddy, the sort of talk that goes on is frightfully banal; nothing but games and school gossip, You've never been to a girls' school."

"Profoundly true! But it is as well to learn to endure boredom in your youth or even to triumph over it." He added more seriously: "You can leave as soon as you have done your University Entrance Examinations, then you can amuse yourself and travel for a year, and then go to College. Admit that that is reasonable."

"Yes, I suppose it is. Oh, Daddy, *what* a lovely frock that woman's got on! Look—the one who's just going out of the door now. Yes, I would like coffee, if there's time."

"We have another ten minutes."

"All right." Wendy looked earnestly at her father. "What fun it would be to live a life where one had heaps of lovely clothes and changed one's frock four times a day!"

"Perhaps also a little 'banal' after a time——"

"Oh, well, I suppose *everything* is after a time. Let me light it for you." Wendy took his cigar and put it between her lips and puffed at it twice.

"Ugh! It *is* nasty!" She handed it back with a grimace. "I tried smoking grass in a clay pipe the other day."

"And what new sensation did you achieve?"

Wendy laughed. "It wasn't very new. I was fearfully sick. There was a cricket match going on, and two other girls and I got bored with watching, and one of them had some of those awful little pipes—she's had them for blowing soap bubbles, I believe, and we tried—pretty filthy!"

"But it isn't allowed is it?"

"Of *course* not, my dear. I suppose that's why we did it—mostly."

"I have always thought that the taste of forbidden fruit was greatly over-rated."

"But then, the fruit one *is* allowed often has no taste at all!"

Edgar acknowledged to himself that she was quick even if (and on this point he wasn't yet certain)—even if she was superficial—shop window and little "stock." Aloud he replied:

"That all depends on the quality of your palate."

Wendy leant towards him—again Cynthia's trick!—and laughed.

"You mean, old darling, that even bread and butter is a feast to someone with the right sort of palate!"

"Exactly"—he glanced over the bill.

Wendy began to draw on her gloves with a faintly affected leisureliness of manner.

"But, Daddy, you see since the war bread is so nasty, and butter is only margarine."

He looked at her, raising his tufty eyebrows, and half-mockingly drawing down the corners of his mouth under his moustache.

"Symbolic aphorism?"

She was a little disconcerted by being puzzled.

"What d'you mean, Daddy?"

His look relaxed to an infinitely gentle smile.

"Only a little more than you did, mon enfant."

She rose with a certain eagerness to escape this slight impasse to her understanding.

"Come on, my dear, or we shall be late and one can never get taxis now when one wants them."

Edgar followed her out, and across the hall: she made him feel, this youngest half-naïve, half enigmatic daughter, old and curiously solid.

VII

September, 1918. Zina sat on the low wall the southern side of the rose garden. Glancing over the beds she reflected ruefully on their unkempt appearance; the grass needed cutting; the bushes and pergolas hadn't been pruned properly for three years now. One *couldn't* keep all that going, with the whole vegetable garden to look after, and all those potato fields by the cricket pavilion.

She glanced away across the fields, down toward the river—occasional gleams of water between the willows: she watched Wendy walk down the field path, a towel flung over her shoulder, then turn when she reached the river and wander upstream toward the bathing-place.

Zina sighed, overcome by lassitude: she wasn't actually tired, she had had an "off day" from her gardening—

but the air felt too warm, as though all the freshness had been absorbed by the thick coppery sunlight. Her brain and senses were dull; one thought so little now, never read or played, just work and sleep and meals, and day after day being swallowed up by the occupations that filled them. Her thoughts turned dully to what she told herself without producing any vital reaction was her "situation"—anyway "a situation" in her life; but it seemed so terribly not to matter, to be merged in the general indifference of her outlook. She knew, and it affected her with a kind of bleak humour, that her family, her parents, Wendy—Nannie too—should see in her "situation," even though they didn't openly refer to it, so much significance and reality.

To her it was so obvious that George Barrett-Saunderson would any day ask her to marry him that she scarcely looked on the "proposal" as a future event, merely considered it as incidental to what had been for four months a present, yet somehow not overwhelming, problem. She had had to make herself think about it, to try and force herself to realise it *as* a problem which she must solve one way or another. But what she was most aware of as a dull, thudding accompaniment to her thoughts was always the sense that it didn't much matter—that nothing much mattered—what one ate or who one married and where and how one lived: it all had a dreary and occasionally awful insignificance.

She had once, as a child, seen the statue of a nymph in a deserted garden, sitting there with sightless eyes, her head thrown back and her arms clasping her knees, seeming not to know or care whether the sun touched her or whether wet leaves fell on her shoulders and rustled and drifted round her feet, or whether her garden were deserted; and Zina had been sorry for her, and a little afraid—and had lingered behind the "grown-ups" and crept up to the "poor lady" and kissed her cheek and found it queerly cold.

Zina thought, "*Does* it matter—much? Now?"—and turned with a sort of panic from all that the "now" implied. There was always—perhaps one got used to that—a dull, low pain in trying to forget; but the other, to

remember, as even with all one's desire for oblivion, one couldn't help remembering sometimes, was so much worse. It was enough to be always conscious, below the ebb and flow of one's daily existence, of depths of sheer negation, which bore one nowhere: to know, even though one didn't look back, that there had been once another kind of world—a kind of young, magical place where things mattered and there were all sorts of beliefs and adventures.

She still gazed down toward the river. She tried to envisage a married life with George Barrett-Saunderson. It might be tolerably successful—settled: it would arrange things for one, make some sort of path for one to follow. She had seen him since he had been invalided out in March and come back to live in the neighbourhood on a scale of frequency which increased from casual encounters and his occasional calls on her family to a definitely sought intimacy, facilitated for him by the fact that a brother officer was, at the time, one of the Pelham Court "convalescents." Since April he had come on some pretext nearly every day; "to help Lady Renner" with the local Red Cross organisation; to give Wendy in her holidays some "tennis coaching"; to repair the electric-light engine whose constitution suffered under the care of the only "boy" on the estate; to mend Nannie's sewing machine; and, when all other occasions were lacking, to talk to his friend, a quiet young man with a bad shoulder wound who seemed at first flattered by his superior officer's thirst for his company and later tacitly amused at his real position in the Major's diplomacy.

George Barrett-Saunderson had come out of the war, or anyway the three and a half years of his experience, with what he referred to as "a rather shot about leg," with a D.S.O. (to which he didn't refer) and without a wife—whom he had divorced by her request and on his own principles. Her he also relegated with what he considered the most and least honourable episode of his life to the realm of "things not referred to" (both his decoration and his divorce being the result of happenings whose reality made them, for him, indecent save in a shroud of silence). If he allowed any embitterment to tinge the

optimism which he considered "good form," it was only apparent in his resentment that his tennis wouldn't be "much use" any more, and even on this topic he was restrained and somewhat jocular, lest in inviting sympathy he might conjure up pity. In some things (so much dawned on Zina listening so often to his talk on judgment) his arrogant conventionality gave him dignity and a sort of modesty by tradition which, however superficial, induced a certain respect for his "type" even when he failed, as an individual, to be deeply liked.

Just so far Zina got that she definitely had a respect for, and a certain trust in, his "type"; one could, just perhaps because of a certain rigidity and compactness of mental composition, rely on him; one knew—and criticism in her mocked, only too well, where one was with someone whose principles, beliefs and tastes were not merely uncompromising and definite, but were quite unaggressively assumed by their owner to be absolute and part of a right and universal code. She forced her judgment from type to individual, from relying to liking; he wasn't (she worked by negatives) really dull—told one quite interesting things, talked well enough really; and he was far from incompetent—his army record (she woke in herself a mild pity and admiration) was good enough. And he wasn't hard-hearted—on the contrary, children and animals liked him—she grasped at a positive point; and he was, of course (the realisation left her indifferent, though it was from the point of view of daily intimacy, a quality), good looking in his "guardee" manner. She told herself that she didn't expect him—didn't *want* him—to stir her senses or imagination, she had fundamentally the sense that this very absence of glamour and wonder in her feeling toward him somehow absolved her from any treachery, any sort of betrayal of the past—and of what might have been. There wasn't, and she felt this as a forlorn but perfectly reasonable justification of what she might do, any connection between the two—between what might have been and what might be now; this, she reasoned, was simply practical, and a "change" (and there were moments when the desire for change was like a dragging, monotonous pain), this was a solution—to marry—or rather (so particu-

larly she foresaw it as an occupation) to have a married life.

She heard an irregular step on the flagged path, and turned quickly.

"Hoped I should find you somewhere in the garden." George seemed, as he sat down on the wall beside her, especially good-looking and bronzed, and adequate. He looked her up and down in his swift manner of seeing and yet not appearing in the least impressed by what he saw and looked away, more carefully, at the nearest rose bushes.

"Have you just come over?"

He nodded and pulled his panama further over his eyes: in profile she could only see now the straight, rather short, nose, the brown moustache and blunt, square chin."

"I saw your mother in the house—I thought she looked a bit tired."

"I'm afraid she is rather." Zina's voice was chilled. She knew, and yet wouldn't quite admit to herself, how entirely the present estrangement between herself and her mother was *her* fault. She sometimes resented Cynthia's proud, sweet gentleness, feared, with what she knew was a harsh cowardice, any sympathy and understanding.

"I expect this stuffy weather's making her feel a bit done up." It was George Barrett-Saunderson's way of saying that he realised that Cynthia still felt her son's death. Zina realised—and almost hated him; her next words were petulant:

"I loathe this weather."

He was urgently consoling.

"I'm sure you work too hard," her tone had given him a sudden and welcome sense of her being less reasonable, inferior to himself, and therefore, in his judgment, more attractively feminine, more, so he would have phrased it, "get-atable" than usual. She pleased him, attracted him altogether, more directly to-day; the ruddy and usually rebellious waves of her hair were smoother, and she wore a dress whose delicacy appealed to him infinitely more than her usual land-worker's clothes, which he

resented. He had envisaged her as his wife now for three months; had admired and wanted her with an intensity tempered to a certain respect and caution and protectiveness by the fact that she would, if he possessed her at all, become his property. A coolness and listlessness in her seemed to his observation to indicate that she wouldn't be, as his first wife had been, moved by passions and resentments—to indicate a kind of "good form" in her which he so supremely believed desirable in the partner of his social existence. He had, so he told himself, "lost his head" about Olive—married her without realising what she was like, carried away by her somewhat exotic prettiness and her sudden passionate response to his own attractiveness; and, of course, it hadn't been a success; Olive getting disagreeable and cynical—and no children—— Well, one didn't make the same mistakes twice. His next words seemed to him born of sheer common-sense and forethought:

"Zina, I want you to marry me." The phrase was clipped and confident: moving a little away from her, turning on her one of his uncommitting glances, he felt how strongly reasonable he was—how entirely his motive was unbiassed by her mere appearance.

She noted the move and wondered.

"I know you do——"

A hesitation on his part admitted a disconcertion which might have become annoyance if he hadn't been mollified by the slow, attractive grace of her turning to face him, and look at him, again rather disconcertingly, from under shadowing lashes. He pursued: "Will you, Zina?"

She didn't answer—still looking at him: she couldn't, at that moment, have said exactly of what she was thinking; an irrelevant muddle of reflections and mild fragmentary sensations . . . that his eyes were a good blue—but shallow—that she liked his tie—that at last a cool breeze had sprung up—that she really must answer him definitely one way or another and get it all decided. She said at last slowly:

"Do you love me?"—and then wondered why she had asked the one question which she didn't want him to ask her—and which she believed he wouldn't, according to his

nature, have asked her—yet. But he seemed to take his cue:

"I do love you a lot, Zina, and I absolutely believe I can make you happy." (Zina dismissed a sudden memory of his first wife—a speculation as to just why? . . .) He continued, still stiff and practical in tone, but taking her hand, and moving close to her again.

"I believe our marriage would be a great success—that we're absolutely suited to each other"—his language wasn't facile among psychological motives and deductions —"that—I mean—we really ought to hit it off properly, and that this really isn't just a kind of temporary attraction. I can see you absolutely as my wife, and doing things my way. As you know, I believe"—his manner was half-embarrassed, half pompous—"as you know I—I divorced —Olive; she was absolutely the wrong sort for me—I was a young fool and I made a mistake——"

Zina assented: "Yes, I know," and was suddenly sorry for him; he seemed at this moment a small boy— proud and resentful—and pathetic in his inability to tolerate the consequence of his own mistake.

He was unconsciously encouraged by her sympathy, which was only manifest to him in the softening of her look and a queer little smile at the corner of her mouth. He plunged on, somewhat grandiloquently:

"Thank God, one learns from experience that marriage has to be founded on mutual respect—and having the same tastes and ideas——" Her lack of response which had always served their relation as well as acquiescence, since he concluded that all who didn't actually contradict agreed with him, led him, while he held her hand and his right arm slid round her shoulders, into further pronouncements on marriage and the relation between men and women. That his generalisations, though mainly true, were banal and expressed with no illuminating verbosity, seemed to Zina unimportant: what obsessed her suddenly and astonishingly was the realisation of his physical attraction for her—that the mere sensation of his hand on her shoulder should have woken her from her only too reasoning apathy. She was astonished and at the same time hurt and angry with herself, and with him. She knew, even while she shivered

curiously at his touch, that she hadn't in the least felt this before; that she hadn't any real æsthetic appreciation of his looks, that she had always found him rather "obvious" in his strong, blunt handsomeness.

She had a panicked realisation that she must "decide" now—quickly—before he finished talking: her reason urged—"Well, it'll be better after all—than if he didn't attract me at all"—but some other fastidious, elusive instinct urged on her the sense that it was somehow—somehow a little shameful, more degrading—to marry him because of the added persuasion of his mere animal attraction for her than to have gone into it coolly and dully; more degrading, and perhaps, in the end, less bearable. But her more blatant reasoning—the addition of still another motive for marrying him and settling down—gained her decision. He had stopped speaking now, was waiting for her to reply; she felt his embrace grip her more closely, and said curtly, under her breath:

"Yes, I will."

A less complacent man might have been startled at the tone: he bent towards her—then felt against his lips a sudden gnawing, sensual kiss—then she leant back and he saw that she was pale, and half smiling.

"*God*—you little *devil!*"

She said nothing, and still looked at him half smiling and as though she hated him. She wondered why she wanted to laugh. He repeated—staring at her, a gleam of pleasure in his look—"You—you little *devil*——"

Now Zina wondered coolly, "How queer of me to be able to kiss anyone like that"—and let him kiss her eyes and mouth and throat with a sense of having anyway—"decided things."

. . . . .

That night George Barrett-Saunderson, in his own smoking-room, lay back in an armchair, contented, a little amused and reflective. If the episode of the afternoon had given him a doubt as to the absolute "good form" which he had thought Zina's intrinsic quality, and of the coolness which he had, especially in theory, found commendable, her behaviour had agreeably stirred his senses,

besides permitting him a feeling of condescension toward her. He generalised pleasantly, puffing smoke up toward the ceiling—"These sort of spiritual lookin' girls—you never know——" and smiled to himself, and then yawned. Zina had promised to marry him in December. If only this rotten war would stop and they could go somewhere decent, like the Riviera, for their honeymoon. His leg gave him a sudden jab of pain; he swore gently, shifted his foot on the stool, and then smiled to himself again.

He was, from the nature of things, unaware while he lounged in complacent meditation that the creature whom he wished in the exuberance of his conventions to take to Monte Carlo was huddled on the window-seat of her bedroom, shivering from head to foot, her burning forehead and eyelids pressed against her arms, moaning at intervals in the voice of a nightmare-haunted child—"Colin, darling —why don't you come *back*—Colin, why don't you come *back*, my darling——"

VIII

November 11th, 1918. Nanny sat alone in the nursery sewing. The youngest housemaid had just taken away the supper-tray, put two pieces of coal on the fire and departed downstairs to the impromptu "Armistice Dance" in the servants' hall.

The nursery was quiet save for the ticking of the grandfather clock in the corner and the occasional gentle hissing of the fire. Nanny moved the electric lamp on the table beside her, to bring it nearer to her sewing: she had nowadays to be careful of her eyes. The light shone on the silveriness which frosted her thick brown hair; it touched the tiny kindly wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and the weighty gold brooch inlaid with blue mosaic which she had inherited from her mother which, clamped on the fastening of her white blouse, had always seemed to the children as much an intrinsic part of her being as the reassuring tones of her voice.

She shifted her glasses and bent more closely over her work, trying to banish a dragging melancholy which beset her tranquil, courageous soul. She was making a crêpe-de-chine jumper for Wendy, according to minute and

urgent instructions written from school. Nanny was of the opinion that Wendy thought too much about her clothes, but her opinion didn't mar the perfection of her stitchery, nor was she altogether displeased with the idea of how pretty "that child" would look when she wore the jumper with the new coat and skirt that was put away for the holidays.

(Nanny waged a perpetual, and sometimes successful, battle against Wendy's inclination to take her newest clothes back to school—where, as Nanny frequently pointed out, "there was no need to dress up" and none of the things were properly looked after). She took Wendy's letter out of the pocket of her apron and re-read the instructions " . . . *not* a square neck, which I hate and which always looks smug—and the band round the hips *tight*, or it makes me look fat and like a penguin—also the cuffs wide and with links, not buttoning (and two sets of links to allow for losing!). If Mummie says yes, I would like one *just like it*—only in jade green. I am writing to her about it. My new dancing shoes are wearing frightfully badly."

There was a step on the linoleum outside, then the door was opened.

"I am not disturbing you, Nanny?" Cynthia hesitated in the doorway.

Nanny put down the letter and got up. "Certainly not, m'lady." She pushed forward a second chair to the fire, then resumed her sewing. Cynthia sat down slowly, and leant one elbow on the fender, a high, black, nursery-fender, topped by a double brass rail and dented in several places where Wendy had used to bang it with a poker to make "Indian music"! She glanced at the letter.

"Oh, has Wendy written to you too about a second jumper? I've said she can have one."

"I think that she has enough to go on with, m'lady."

Cynthia smiled absently. "Oh, let her have another, Nan, if she wants it."

Nanny shook her head over her sewing.

"I think it would be far best not."

"Very well." Cynthia was looking into the fire and Nanny, glancing up, was struck by her more than usually fragile look—she was always pale and a little unreal

now—and by the rings of shadow round her eyes, and the weariness of her tone.

"You look tired." She didn't say what she sadly and pitifully realised—that Cynthia looked older: watching the unmoving profile she perceived how much older, not so much in feature as in general air, she had become in the last few years: how completely her vivacity, her easy handsomeness—her entirely confident charm had gone. Nanny thought—"She's a changed woman"—and felt too how much her own feelings for life had altered. Cynthia's next words almost echoed this consciousness :

"Aren't you tired, too, Nanny?"

She was still looking into the fire, and Nanny, laying down her work on her lap, thought that she had never seen her appear more "beautiful"—and yet she looked with her black dress and listless pose so worn out.

They sat in silence now, yet each was conscious of the same thoughts, the same helpless sadness that haunted them, and seemed to hover in the corners of the room. At last Cynthia spoke again:

"So now it's over—the war—at last: eleven o'clock this morning. . . ."

"I suppose we must thank God, m'lady——"

Nanny threaded the needle.

"Must we, Nanny? I suppose so—even now. Perhaps *you* can."

"Yes—I can: we must be thankful for peace at last." Cynthia whispered. "Yes, I know," and was silent again.

"I suppose Zina and Sir Edgar will be seeing all the excitement in London to-night."

"Sir Edgar rang me up before dinner. He said London's gone mad, naturally. And that Zina's going to dine out with her young man. He said he'd try and come down here by the late train. I'm glad Zina's going out."

"Maybe it's as well."

"I wonder if she's . . . excited."

Nanny's answer was enigmatic:

"Gone mad too, I expect"—but Cynthia turned and saw

tears in her eyes: they avoided, save superficially, the topic of Zina's approaching marriage. Nanny added:

"People are no more mad now than they have been for four years—poor souls!"

Cynthia stared again into the burning coals. "It's the sort of madness that has to be paid for." Her left hand slid along the rail of the fender, and she remembered quaint rows of white woolly socks and tummy belts drying there and her sadness clutched her like a physical agony so that her words came between dry lips:

"It's the insanity of waste, Nanny—the awful, brutal, *incredible* waste . . . lives . . . happiness . . . beauty—for *nothing*—really."

"There was no other way, m'lady—the war had to be—we couldn't have stayed out——"

"I know . . . it had to be *then*—but why should it exist at all?—this form of waste and horror—if there weren't *enough* misery otherwise in the world——"

"It is . . . wickedness: it comes from hatred and covetousness and oppression."

"What's been the good of it all, Nanny—of all this misery and pain . . . of"—she spoke now with a strange, helpless calm—"of John . . . being killed."

Nanny took the hand that lay along the fender rail, and held the slim cold fingers and murmured, "Hush, my dear," as though Cynthia had been a child; and Cynthia went on—but quietly now—and with a faint sense of comfort from the hand that held hers—and had an incidental comprehension of what Zina had meant when she once said "Nanny makes you feel good again."

"It's so awful to think that all these boys—that John—had so little of life—only twenty-one years—only just the beginning of things—after all that preparation—to be so strong—and so immensely young and happy, and then for no reason . . ."

Nanny breathed: "Mr. Colin too"—and Cynthia bent her head in acquiescence.

"Colin too—and Zina's life—perhaps, spoiled," her speech was quick and bitter now, "Nanny, I'm so desperately afraid for Zina—and I haven't any power, because——"

Nanny spoke gently: "She's unhappy—the poor lamb—and yet she won't face it properly—and she's kind of jealous that you should be thinking of John when she can only think of Mr. Colin when she looks back——"

"But John was her brother."

Nanny shook her head—still stroking the cold fingers. "The lover must always come first——" Nanny's wisdom went further than her words and she held her peace.

"What can I *do?*"

"Nothing—but wait—and treat her gently."

"I think I do—but she's so aloof."

"She's afraid——"

The quiet that held them now had a dreamlike quality—and Cynthia, gradually lapped about by a kind of spent peacefulness, shut her eyes—and was assailed by sweet, fragmentary memories that seemed to creep out of the corners of the nursery. She murmured:

"Do you remember, Nan—how *naughty* he used to be—sometimes making wigwams with his blankets when he was supposed to be resting—and the day he cut off all his curls with my nail scissors (. . . I could never have *borne* to punish him—if I hadn't been rather afraid of you, Nanny!) He *was* fat, as quite a little boy—wasn't he? How he hated being called 'Augustus,' poor darling . . . the funny way he puckered up his eyes when he was annoyed—and stamped till his socks came down. . . ."

Nanny's voice caught some of the sudden magic in the air—"A picture he was—when he first got his white sailor suits; such a boyish scamp he was too. . . . Never cried when he was hurt, except that once when he fell out of the oak tree, and that was only just because he'd set his heart on getting that mistletoe that the gardeners couldn't reach, and he'd fallen before he got it!"

A coal shifted in the fire. Cynthia started and then half-closed her eyes again.

"Nanny, what one can't . . . *can't* believe —is that something that was once such a darling baby and then such a fat, naughty little boy, and gradually grew up for us to be so proud of him—something that one loved so—and hoped and planned such a lot for, should just be broken

and wasted, right at the beginning of fulfilling everything one had hoped and thought and worked for. That this baby grew up just to be killed and thrown away with millions of others—in a civilised age!"

"Millions of others. It does seem to me there must be great evil in our age for such a thing to be possible as it is, and our poor lamb one of the innocent that always suffer——"

The semi-biblical phraseology woke in Cynthia the memory of how John used, in affectionate teasing, to parody Nanny's more sententious remarks—to misquote her aphorisms—such as "unpunctuality is the fruit of a slovenly nature," until even *her* equanimity was disturbed, and then laugh her into a good temper again.

"I suppose the one consolation is that John himself *enjoyed* it all so . . . to the last moment. All his letters were so *full* of how thrilling—and what an immense joke it all was. He doesn't ever seem to have been—afraid."

"Yes, it all seemed a 'sport' to him. It was as well it was like that—it wasn't so for all of them. There were some natures that couldn't look at it in that way . . . Mr. Colin—*he* was different. I don't think he ever told anyone . . . not even Zina—for fear of upsetting her—what *he* felt when he was out there."

Cynthia was silent; she had to face the fact, which she hated, and couldn't alter, that John's death had made Colin's being killed (even though that had altered the whole course of Zina's life) seem a mere happening, something dreadful—but quite outside. And Zina had known this, had felt, even while John was alive, that his danger—the possibility that he too . . . disharmonised their sympathies. Cynthia told herself: "We ought both to give more, to try and feel each other's point of view—but the barrier—screen—couldn't be moved by words and intentions; and yet she felt that if—if only it could be broken down—by some strength of sympathy which she just didn't seem to possess—then Zina mightn't be going to marry like this with a sort of bravado which couldn't entirely obscure the dullness of her emotional convictions."

"There's the car, m'lady."

"I wonder what it's been like in London all day—I told Lessing to say I was up here——"

Two minutes later Edgar came in, to find them seated together. The peace of the nursery pervaded him after the turmoil of the day. He bent to kiss Cynthia's forehead.

"Darling—you are quite well?"

She nodded.

"And you, Nanny?"

"Thank you, Sir Edgar."

He drew up a chair and sat between them. Cynthia laid her hand on his shoulder, half in gratitude for his being there, half from her desire to comfort him—he looked terribly tired—and to make him feel her gratitude for his return.

"Tell us, Hans——!"

He picked up a corner of Nanny's sewing between finger and thumb and absently dropped it again.

"About what, my dear?"

"This morning . . . London. . . ."

He looked wearily at her.

"I am glad you were not there, Cyntia—it was too—hysterical. I think a nation must always lose its dignity and self-control on such occasions: it is only too natural and therefore a little bit sickening. Such shrieking and jostling, people tearing about screaming and embracing and knocking one another in their mad desire to express they do not quite know *what:* I don't mean it is anything disgraceful, this kind of madness, only pitiful because it has no meaning except as an expression of overwrought nerves: when they cry or laugh—all those women I saw to-day, it is not the real grief of remembrance or *real* joy (that comes later): it is a kind of intoxication, wonderful perhaps, when one sees great crowds moved in that way, but pitiful." He shook his head. "There was no sanity in it, no realisation that though this signing of the Armistice is a thing for which they should be too thankful for speech, it is not the end of all the war, but only an alleviation of the worst evil of all—the great step toward recovery—but only the *first* step."

Nanny had laid down her sewing to listen while he spoke: there were tears in her eyes.

"That's true, Sir Edgar: there is too much that can't be undone—and there must still be consequences. . . ."

Cynthia asked under her breath:

"And Zina?"

"I am glad that Zina let herself be infected by the general madness. She shouted and cried and cheered and didn't *think*. At this moment she is at the Savoy with George."

"Nanny said too that she thought that was best."

"It is easier for us." He looked at Cynthia, and even at this moment was aware with a poignant thankfulness of her restraint as something exquisite and beautiful after the clamorousness of the day. "It is easier for us who are older to take these things quietly: there is so much we have *had*—but for the younger ones it is *not* so possible . . . These times have taken more from them than from us, even though we may know how much we have lost——"

Cynthia got up.

"I think I'll go to bed, Hans, darling." They saw she was crying.

He got up and took her arm and Nanny patted her shoulder.

"That's right, my lamb—you go along and have a proper sleep."

Edgar followed her.

"Good-night, Nanny!"

"Good-night, Sir Edgar." Nanny was methodically folding up her sewing and didn't look up. He closed the nursery door after him.

In the passage Cynthia said in a shaken voice. "Don't leave me alone."

"No, my dear—of course not——"

He switched on the light in her room: she sank down on the sofa by the fire and he made her lie down and arranged the cushions behind her head and fetched the eiderdown from the bed to cover her..

"Why don't you have a bath and go to bed properly, dearest?"

She shook her head and lay still, crying quietly the exhausted, effortless tears of an old woman. There was

no anger, not even amazement, any more in her grief —that had come at first, like a storm—horror and misery and resentment, shaking the foundations of her happiness and beliefs, destroying all the rare complex beauty of her outlook and changing, by what seemed sheer devastation, the very conformation of her character. Edgar himself had taken John's death as one more and most intimate tragedy in the prolonged horrors of the war, but it hadn't, he knew "changed" him, altered his whole *tempo*, as it had Cynthia's; hadn't taken so much from him.

Yet, watching her now as he sat beside her, noting absently how her pretty delicate hands crumpled up her handkerchief—and, by comparison with memory, seeing her as paler and older, with no trace of her gay, high-handed manner and a certain witty complacency—he knew that she hadn't essentially "lost"—that whatever had gone, in youth and gaiety and pride, she had gained "something"—the knowledge didn't explain itself verbally in mind—which made her, not only to him but absolutely, greater, finer and more sensitive than she had been.

She said suddenly:

"Hans, you must be tired out——"

"I'm not, my dear."

"I'm so glad you came down to-night—funny one is to mind so much more just because of the Armistice. . . . Stupid of me—Nanny *is* a dear, good creature. Queer that she and I . . . should be left over . . . when John . . ."

"And I. . . ."

She whispered:

"Hans, darling——"

He kissed her hand—thought with an ache of love and pity which held him speechless, "It *is* worst of all for *her* . . . for women; they are most at the mercy of the fate of those they love. Cynthia . . . Zina . . . their lives changed or . . . broken or . . . "—he thought of Zina's marriage—"perhaps distorted." She had stopped crying now and looked gently at him.

"Hans, darling . . . I think I'm horribly selfish and ungrateful—if it weren't for you—my dear; you *have* been good to me! . . . Now I'm going to insist on your

going to bed . . . really . . . and then I shall. We're both tired—and"—she smiled—"and Nanny will come along to see that we're not 'sitting up.'"

"Cyntia—you are wonderful."

She kissed him. "*I'm* not. Good-night, my dear!"

III

PEACE ON EARTH

So when the Spring of the world shall shrive our stain,
After the winter of war.
When the poor world awakens to peace once more,
After such night of ravage and of rain,
You shall not come again.
You shall not come to taste the old Spring weather,
To gallop through the soft untrampled heather,
To bathe and bake your body on the grass.
We shall be there alas!
But not with you. When Spring shall wake the earth.
And quicken the scarred fields to the new birth,
Our grief shall grow. For what can Spring renew
More fiercely for us than the need of you?

MAURICE BARING.

PART THREE

I

ZINA was to be married at the end of December in the little village church at Pelham. Mr. Grimmer had not merely consented to have no scruples in marrying George, although the latter had divorced his first wife, but rather took up the point of view that in performing the ceremony he was fulfilling a dual task: firstly, showing his approval of Barrett-Saunderson, whom he considered a virtuous, and knew to be a wealthy, parishioner; secondly, emphasising the sinfulness of the *first* Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson, of whom his sister, Miss Grimmer, spoke in those almost salacious terms often used by women, for whom chronic chastity is not so much a virtue as a visitation, to describe creatures whom they imply to be less "fortunate." Miss Grimmer, in fact, enjoyed the whole affair: the divorce in the background gave it spice, which made her lick her lips and goggle her small beady eyes whenever any subject connected with the wedding was mentioned. She had a weakness, which she allowed to be apparent in the form of pitying approval, for "the Major." She loquaciously, in her peregrinations, pitied "the Captain—or rather, the Major, as he is now!" his first wife—pursing up her face as though genteely to repress a belching of scandalous matter —and hoped he might find "more satisfaction in the next." She dwelt sadly on the Major's lameness, and gloried in his D.S.O., somehow hinting that the decoration intensified his atmosphere of martyrdom. Once she hinted to the girl in the post office that it was very forgiving of the Major, "considering all things," to be marrying Miss Renner—and went so far in explanation as to say that "*considering*" Sir Edgar's Austrian upbringing before he was naturalised, "the Major might *very* well have looked upon her as one of the enemy"; but Miss Grimmer did not venture far on these lines, being conscious of a public opinion in the

district which during the war had at one time ostracised her for her remarks of a similar kind about the family at "the Court." Moreover, it was rapidly and blazingly apparent that the girl at the post office, who had been the intermediary for all correspondence to and from "the Court" for six years held a divergent opinion and went so far as to say, with a toss of her carroty head, that "things would have been *very* different if Mr. Colin had lived. . . . He used to write pretty nearly ev'ry day—and *often* the letters was *over*weight! . . . And the Major can consider 'imself a lucky man when 'e's 'ad *one* wife already that couldn't stand 'im!" At which outburst Miss Grimmer had been more discreet than valorous and prinked off to the dressmaker, to whom she confided, while trying on a claret-coloured "coat-frock" trimmed with black silk braid and buttons, designed specially for "the wedding," that she was convinced that the girl in the post office opened and read all correspondence, adding that if she, Miss Grimmer, liked she could "give proof of it!" The dressmaker, who could not speak because her mouth was clamped on a row of pins, gave a little whine of interest—Miss Grimmer was a regular though not frequent customer—and moved a pocket an inch higher, and gave another little whine of enquiry. Miss Grimmer regarded the effect in the glass.

"A little more to the left—and I shall stick a little handkerchief in with just the initialled corner showing—I bought one in London the other day——"

"Yes, *that's* right—and the braid round the pocket and a button—but not to fasten, of course——" she turned and glanced at herself over one shoulder; her figure had the complex quality immortalised by Gilbert as being "both angular and flat." "I think I should like three box-pleats down the back instead of the *one* in the picture—more original!"

The dressmaker nodded and made sounds whose inflections resembled "As you like, madam!" and, taking up her scissors, began to unpick the tacking threads on the shoulders.

"Well, as I was saying, that girl—of course it was a sad thing naturally about Mr. Colin Russell—but the

Major's a better match *any* day, and she should thank Providence instead of going about looking so wispy and sort of 'affected.' She's got quite skinny in the last few years——" Miss Grimmer smoothed her own hip bones and went on in a satisfied tone:

"Quite a select little wedding it'll be—just family and one or two intimate friends—as they want it quiet—for *several* reasons——" She expected to be asked for specific reasons—but the dressmaker only interrogated with her eyebrows, and as she was at work on her client's back the conversational value of the gesture was wasted. Miss Grimmer expatiated:

"Under the circumstances—and with the family almost in mourning (I shall just wear my white fox to brighten up the costume at the neck, and the black hat with the osprey I told you of—ospreys are being worn a *lot* this winter!) Yes—they're just inviting the Major's parents who are coming to stay with him for Christmas—and staying on for the wedding just after—and a few friends."

The dressmaker had by this time transferred the pins one by one from between her lips to the folds and turnings of the claret-coloured duvetyn, and was able to suppose in a mincing tone that "Miss Wendy would be bridesmaid." Miss Grimmer again pursed up her face and acquiesced.

"Such a pretty young lady she's growing up to be!" added the dressmaker, who in her carefully guarded little private opinion liked Wendy, for whom she occasionally made cotton frocks, as much as she disliked Miss Grimmer; but her trade rested on a certain sycophantism, and only her invalid sister laughed at her shrewd comments on the character and deportment, especially before a looking-glass, of the vicar's sister. Miss Grimmer could not admit that Wendy was pretty.

"Her neck's too long, in my opinion. She's never been a child that I've liked." Miss Grimmer was perhaps naturally unable to forget an occasion ten years before when Wendy, aged five, had screamed and demanded, pointing at the vicar's sister, that someone should "take that nugly lady away!" The memory rankled, though Miss Grimmer was in her own eyes too "just" to condemn Wendy on any

but moral grounds; in fact she believed herself to be tolerant and usually prefixed her most acid comments by some such phrase as "You know I'm not a woman to condemn easily" or "Nobody can say I'm not long suffering, but——"

The dressmaker, on her knees, enquired about the length of the dress: Miss Grimmer was always in this decision torn between the conviction that length of skirt betokens moral worth, and the desire to display her very passable ankles. Not being of a mystical disposition, she did not envisage the conflict as being between the flesh and the spirit —but hit on the reasonable compromise of a long skirt slashed up one side "to give her freedom when she walked." She debated inwardly whether she should wear claret-coloured stockings or black. The dressmaker began to take off the dress.

"This'll be the last fitting, then, madam." (She had discovered that Miss Grimmer preferred madam to a more vestal title). "And you shall have it home before Christmas Eve."

Miss Grimmer was revealed in her stays, whose voluptuous curves, conforming to the ideals of an earlier age, were inadequately replenished by their wearer—a somewhat "macabre" situation.

"Very well—and be *sure* it *is* done in time."

"Yes, madam."

Miss Grimmer allowed her skirt to be fastened for her—and said in a tone intended to convey patronage and encouragement:

"Perhaps you'll be able to get in at the back if there's room—but of course the church doesn't hold *many* people."

"Well, Nurse (from the Court I mean) was down having tea with my sister and me yesterday and she's asked me to go with her and has promised to see that my sister's chair gets in too."

"Oh, well—that will be very nice for you." Even Miss Grimmer could find nothing to say against "Nanny." She put on her jacket and hat and with a more patronising and less encouraging air departed—her final remark being:

"I have no doubt it will be too cold for your sister to go out!" Perhaps Miss Grimmer's most enjoyable sensa-

tions were derived from what the German tongue expresses in the word "schadenfreude"; the perverse pleasure savoured from the misfortunes or humiliations of others.

As the door slammed the dressmaker's sister called from the inner parlour:

"The old cat gone?"

The dressmaker gave a little sigh—she was tired and her head ached—and replied in her mincing tone:

"Yes, Emily—she *has*."

II

George's parents arrived on the 24th to stay with him at Croxtons. It was the first time since their marriage that they had been away for Christmas, and old Mr. Barrett-Saunderson had only, and with misgiving, departed from precedent because the wedding was on the 30th and he suspected travelling from Leicester might be difficult and crowded just before New Year. Moreover, their earlier arrival would enable them to meet Miss Renner, who was to come over on Christmas Day to lunch with her prospective parents-in-law in her future home.

George and his father waited for Zina in the drawing-room. This room George had just had done up by a firm of decorators whose grand yet restrained manner had long established them in London and New York as sponsors of the good if not always of the beautiful in the art of the interior: a judicious blending of Italian "cinquecento" (dark carved chairs, wine red brocade hangings, and a coffer painted in dulled reds, blues and golds with the figures of angels)—with a few pieces of English eighteenth century lacquer and some deep and discreetly upholstered sofas and armchairs of the twentieth century, created an impression, an atmosphere of harmony between luxury and tradition, between connoisseurship and comfort.

The Barrett-Saundersons, father and son, stood with their backs to the fire, in exactly the same attitude—every now and then rising to their toes and sinking again to a firmer stance. Apart from their mannerisms and a resemblance in the narrow, square shape of their foreheads they were not alike in appearance: it was Wendy's simile after seeing them in church that George next to his father looked like

a glossy chestnut next to a tomato! Old Mr. Barrett-Saunderson suggested the three words "Bluff," "Gruff" and "Snuff"; his red face, his vivid, if unsympathetic, blue eyes; his square shoulders and brusque movements gave him a hearty appearance which was belied by his blunt manner and a reticence in his communication with other human beings, which to strangers gave almost an impression of suspiciousness. He didn't actually take snuff, but his countenance seemed, especially in the profile, to belong to the time when that habit was still in vogue and when a gentleman could ride to hounds all day and finish his evening in port-wine sleep under his own dining-room table.

On Zina's arrival he straightened his shoulders, looked her up and down and held out his hand. "How d'ye do, Miss Renner!"

Zina shook hands and thought she was going to like him. He would, she thought, have made a good admiral. George removed her coat and smiled at his father with proprietary pride. Her cheeks had gained colour from her drive in the open car: he reflected that she didn't look more than eighteen and that probably hers were the looks that lasted.

"How do you like the room, Zina?"

"Why it's—it's extraordinarily good—lovely those curtains are——" (She was thinking "It really is—effective. George can't have planned it out himself.")

"I got Millington and Devant to do it for me."

"Very good firm, very good firm *indeed!*" grunted old Mr. Barrett-Saunderson.

"Yes," agreed Zina, with a shadowy comparison in her mind.

"Here's mother!" George stepped forward to take his mother by the arm. "Mother—this is Zina."

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson said, "How d'you do?" in a flat voice and shook hands without conviction and gave a little watery smile. She seemed to Zina neither young nor old, neither happy nor sad, neither charming nor unattractive: yet she somehow wasn't mediocre; there was a kind of "quality" about her—a wistful, faded distinction which suggested that perhaps once long ago she had felt herself to be of some consequence—hadn't always been so negative.

The same suggestion lingered in her looks; she was small and grey-haired, delicate but uninteresting in appearance—and yet she might once, for her features were fine and regular, when she had had a little colour and positive vitality, have been pretty. When she had shaken hands with Zina she apologised to her husband and son for being a little late, and explained that the maid had been slow in bringing her hot water, and added, turning to Zina with a manner that was partly friendly, partly timid:

"I expect they need you to look after them—maids are not what they were."

"Hot water," said her husband, rising on his toes as though by the impetus of his convictions, "hot water isn't at all necessary: I've always found cold do just as well."

His wife regarded him with an expression neither of agreement nor dissent. The gong was sounded in the hall.

"Luncheon at last—I hope you're hungry, father, I ordered Christmas dinner in the middle of the day, as I know you have it like that at home. Yes, Mother, you and Zina go first."

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson consented, with a slight demur, to take the place at table opposite her son, Zina protesting that it wasn't *hers* yet.

Mr. Barrett-Saunderson settled down with an air of adjusting himself to enjoy his repast, fixed Zina with his direct glance and enquired what she had thought of the sermon.

"Well, of course, that excellent Grimmer hasn't much intelligence—*has* he?" She smiled, failing to observe any signal of disconcertion on the inexpressive countenance of her prospective father-in-law, and continued: "My little sister Wendy made up rather a delicious limerick about him the other day—didn't I tell you, George?" George's air of annoyance was lost upon her.

> "' *There was once a person called Grimmer*
> *Who of intellect hadn't a glimmer,*
> *And his sense, it appears,*
> *With the passing of years*
> *Grew dimmer and dimmer and dimmer.*'

"Isn't it rather nice?"

As she spoke the last words Zina was already aware that she had transgressed the bounds of that particular enclosure of conversation ticketed "What one thinks of a sermon," and George remarked, "Wendy is a naughty young woman"—an exhibition of tact for which Zina admired him. Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson looked distressed, and Zina was afraid she was thinking, "This girl is no better than the other." Zina was sorry for her and acutely wished she hadn't blundered. In fact, Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson was only vaguely thinking it "a pity" Zina should have spoken like that; she never condemned anyone, except when her husband insisted on her doing so—though there were many things, from illnesses to the use of cosmetics, which she considered "a pity."

George began to talk to his father about the shooting and the lack of birds due to the war, and the wildness of those that one had. Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson, as though relieved by the consciousness that her husband wasn't listening to her, became more talkative—asked Zina about her family, and recollecting having been at the same school as Lady Renner's eldest sister.

"Such lovely girls—your mother and her sister—I remember meeting your mother when she was first grown up and I was still quite a young married woman. Your eyes aren't the same—but you have the same auburny brown hair; I remember when I went with my husband to the Academy one year there was a picture of your mother by—by——" Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson could never quite remember names.

"Yes—that was it—Tarrant."

"Yes—it hangs in the dining-room at home. You'll see it again to-morrow when you come over to dine——"

"That will be very nice—I expect you are very busy with preparations for the wedding?"

"We are rather. Yes—it does seem a fuss—doesn't it?"

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson didn't seem to be sure whether it did and replied in her flat, light voice: "Perhaps—but still——"

Zina saw that she didn't mean really to qualify her "perhaps," and gently suggested a new topic as one offers

crumbs to a caged bird, being careful not to give it anything unaccustomed or too big.

"I do hope you had a comfortable journey yesterday?"

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson pecked with confidence: "Yes, indeed; it was very nice and not at all too crowded, and we had a most thoughtful guard on the train."

Her husband broke in, gruff and assertive:

"Travelling's not what it used to be, not at all. Of course the war's made a difference and most of the men haven't got back yet, but even so, it isn't the same thing at *all;* the workin' classes have been getting above themselves for the last thirty years, and it's time somebody put a stop to it."

Mr. Barrett-Saunderson's complexion under the influence of violent opinion changed from scarlet to crimson, a change which always worried his wife, who was by tradition and habit always concerned for his health and careless about her own. She made the little awkward, protesting gesture by which she always tried to calm him and which invariably succeeded in increasing his vehemence. He faced Zina and then George:

"It's time the workin' man knew his place, and what I say is that all this army discipline won't have done him a scrap of good if he's to come back to a lot of sentimental rubbishy talk about heroes and whatnots! The British Tommy is a fine man, and the British workman *used* to be as good a worker as you could find anywhere. But all this talk, all these speeches by a lot of Liberal nincompoops that are no more than a lot of Socialists masquerading as gentlemen—— *What's* the good of our victory if we go and have a revolution directly after, and that's what it'll come to——"

George was calm: "My opinion is that things will settle down and adjust themselves."

His father shook his head.

"Not with that upstart of a little Welshman ruining our country; winning elections on a lot of promises that aren't worth a farthing!"

Zina ventured the remark, which was to become in the next few years a more and more defensive cliché, that Lloyd George had been "wonderful during the war."

George agreed. "I believe that there happened to be no one else at that time who had his knack of keeping up people's spirits—but now it's a different question."

His father grunted, returning to his second helping of turkey. "That's it—we don't need quackery any more—what we need is a strong, sensible Conservative government and no nonsense about it, and no extravagant programmes."

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson nodded and gave a little sigh, partly because she mentally confused programmes and pogroms and had the impression that both were dangerous, partly because she had more on her plate than she wanted to eat.

The talk drifted into more peaceful channels: the weather was discussed without any of that conversational snobbishness which will only allow of the vagaries of the climate being mentioned perfunctorily. Mr. Barrett-Saunderson found occasion to say that the good old-fashioned Christmas with snow and ice seemed to be a thing of the past, and Zina thought, "It's almost *too* much just what one expects him to say!" At first she was amused, but towards the end of luncheon she began to wonder whether George wouldn't develop precisely such a manner as his father's, proclaiming his opinion in the same gruff tones, exhibiting the same almost crass obstinacy. And yet, in a way, he was fun, the old man, and rather fine in his limited way—but to live with——! She glanced at Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson, and met her cool, vague look, and wondered just what she *had* been like, whether she *had* ever been a person—and not *just*—that was how she seemed to Zina, her husband's "creature." But George *was* different from his father—less prejudiced (and yet, wasn't prejudice the scaly accretion of years?) More brains anyway, but his brains gave him no understanding, no illumination of the soul.

The subject of the wedding recurred. Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson enquired whether there was to be any special music:

"Just the usual 'Wedding March,' I think—Mendlessohn."

Mr. Barrett-Saunderson noisily cracked a walnut:

"I can't understand how people can go on having German music."

George protested that "In matters of art——"

"Art or no art—as if there weren't a lot of good *English* composers—Purcell, Elgar——"

Zina found herself weakly using Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson's formula:

"Perhaps——" She didn't feel capable of arguing with the old man, even had she considered it politic—for she was anxious to obliterate her "faux pas" at the beginning of the meal. Superficially she was relieved to find George and his father opposed on the subject; but she knew the difference was not in kind but in degree, and that some tolerances came easily to George, being, as it were, in the quite respectable air of his milieu and generation. She could get no further, essentially, in reassuring herself, than the certainty that George was cleverer and younger than his father, but that the ratio between their prejudices and those liberations of human thought and activity which she vaguely termed "progress" remained the same—and yet she was going, in a few days, to marry—to be absorbed into this kind of reactionary atmosphere (the term "Conservative" only put it a step higher!)—and because——? She wouldn't at this moment face exactly why.

"——those dreadful Germans——" Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson was saying; "naturally it would be a pity to encourage their music."

"No English man or woman ought to *tolerate it!*"

Zina ventured:

"Perhaps one ought to try and look upon it as an international possession. After all, *they* play Shakespeare considerably more often than we do in England."

She realised with a certain surprise and shame that she wouldn't have expressed her opinion if she hadn't known that George supported her: she began to realise that alone she wouldn't dare—except perhaps on a matter of vital practical importance—to oppose the "feeling" in the family; already she foresaw herself acquiescent in a hundred matters with which she didn't agree, subscribing to prejudices and views which she would inwardly condemn,

repressing words and actions which they might find "queer" or "a pity."

After luncheon they strolled round the gardens; Zina walked with Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson and was conscious of the mingling of clipped and gruff tones of the two men just behind them, and the occasional aroma of smoke from their cigars.

"And so you are going to Paris for your honeymoon?"

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson had been twice to Paris with her husband, who had taken her to an English hotel, to one or two of the best dressmakers, to the races at Longchamps, and to a performance at the Théatre Français, which they had neither of them understood, since she had forgotten her French and he had never bothered to learn any.

Zina shivered in the chilled, quiet air of the garden.

"Yes—travelling's still rather difficult to the Riviera, we thought, and George thinks there won't be a proper English season there yet, and we both like Paris."

"You know it well?"

"I was there for six months just before I grew up—but I haven't been during the war."

"I thought it a very nice place—just to visit. I shouldn't care to stay long. Ah, what a *nice* kitchen garden. George tells me you are a great gardener."

"I've done a great deal. I ran and more or less worked the whole of my parents' place since 1914."

"It must have been very hard work. I used to garden a lot at home," her worn, uninteresting little face lit up for a moment and she glanced at Zina with gentle eagerness. "We have such lovely herbaceous borders—they are supposed to be the best in the country—but now I get so tired. I think, perhaps, it is very tiring work as one gets older, but I used to enjoy it very much."

Her flicker of eagerness died down and she began to look pinched, and ineffectually tried to draw her coat more closely round herself.

"Wouldn't you rather come back to the house and sit by the fire?"

"Perhaps——" Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson glanced round

at the two men who had stopped to examine some cucumber frames. Zina turned too.

"I think it's rather cold for your mother to be out, George. I think she and I will go back to the house."

Old Mr. Barrett-Saunderson overrode the notion.

"Not at all, my dear Miss—well, I suppose I'm allowed to call you Zina—Anne likes the fresh air, don't you, my dear?"

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson prepared to proceed, but Zina was firm, and taking her arm and turning back with her, she smiled blandly:

"No, I really think it *is* rather damp and cold!"

It struck George that it would be thoroughly unfortunate if Zina were to catch cold, and he assented.

"Very well. Father and I will come in later on—you can show Zina her own room, Mother. He smiled briskly after her, feeling that she had, on the whole, "come off well" with his people, and she that was into the bargain extraordinarily attractive. In fact the combination of her appearance and behaviour (save for that one silly remark at luncheon about old Grimmer) satisfied him, gave him a sense of being justified, together with an anticipation of pleasure, and he accompanied "the old man" round the place without once ceding to the irritation which was not to be roused in him by his father's criticisms and extreme, almost pig-headed, egoism.

. . . . .

When Zina got back to Pelham she found her father in the library. He put down his book.

"Well, Zina?"

She crouched down and began to warm her hands at the blaze of great crackling logs.

"*Well*, Daddy?"

He looked at her and remarked in parenthesis:

"I wish you would get a little fatter!"

Zina smiled.

"Nanny says cod liver oil—I suspect she's giving me a magnum for a wedding present——"

"What was your luncheon like?"

"Turkey and plum-pudding!"

"Don't be foolish, Rosina! The human fare?"

"Well—you *know* George," she said, whimsically avoiding his glance (how lovely to feel this warmth creeping through one). "As to the parents—oh, by the way, they are delighted to come to-morrow. I must tell Mummie."

"Did you like them?"

"In a sort of way, Daddy, yes." She amplified the statement thoughtfully, drawing her brows together as she spoke. "They are nice in a way; they're like lots of people one meets, only specially so. He's rather an old tyrant, and I'm sorry for her, because you can see he's never really considered her, even less mentally than physically, and that she's just been a sort of accompaniment and produced children and said the right thing and adopted all his views, even if she ever began with any of her own. I really did quite like her, and she was very nice to me, and I think she was immensely relieved that I didn't talk with an 'Austrian accent' and that she knew Mummie's family—otherwise I felt *he* might have rather grumbled about it at home. Of course he's a mass of prejudice and 'partis-pris'; 'roast-beef' and 'the-country-is-going-to-the-dogs' sort of old man. But George says he's a good landlord and immensely popular: he's really quite fun if one keeps him off controversial subjects."

"George is of much the same type." Edgar left it to Zina to admit, or rather refuse to admit, just how much he implied.

"I know." Her tone was matter-of-fact.

"And you don't mind?"

"No."

The blaze of the logs lit up for him an expressionless profile and the ruddy locks of a Botticelli angel. He reflected incidentally that whereas Zina's short hair made her look less sophisticated than formerly, Wendy's somehow contrived to make her look more so. Zina added defensively, wondering how much her father would say (how much he understood):

"Why should I 'mind'?"

"Similar flowers produce similar fruit——"

" . . . That George will become like his father?"

"I should have thought so, and doubtless you have too!"

"He's cleverer."

"Yes?"

Her father's query, gentle and non-committal, touched on a raw nerve.

"D'you suppose I should want to marry a fool?"

"I do not think that George is a fool. But even so there are, perhaps, circumstances or feelings which make it seem—desirable—even to marry a fool."

She didn't reply.

Even though he knew his own unkindness, he repeated gently:

"Isn't that so, Zina?"

The inexpressive profile nodded to the blaze; she was afraid of what he might say, yet had a hidden longing for him to speak.

"Do you mind what I am saying, mein kind?"

She shook her head.

"Your happiness is so much to me—and your mother, Zina——"

"Happiness!" The inflection of her whisper brought the tears to his eyes.

"You have never allowed me to speak before——"

"I don't want you to *now*"; she knew that her words, faintly uttered, were only half a protest.

"Zina"—there was so much understanding, such infinite sympathy in his deep, gentle voice—"even now it is not too late."

"Yes, Daddy, it is."

"There are still only trivial obstacles——"

Again she shook her head.

" . . . Anyway . . . what else is there?"

The query admitted to him the fear that had never left her since the evening when he had told her the news about Colin; the fear of the future, stretching before her like an abyss, dark and unfathomed—(holding—pain?—despair?)—these threatening depths that had made her so terribly—ceaselessly afraid.

" . . . What else is there?"

"To have a greater courage, mein kind; to fight for—to come to—reality—not to pay what is worth too much in order to escape and forget."

"It's too late."

"Only you yourself make it so."

"I can't face it."

"Zina—you are terribly wrong—you are selling your soul—from fear!"

She repeated dully:

"Daddy, I can't——"

He waited, saying nothing: she went on in a slow monotone:

"Don't you understand, Daddy? . . . Colin . . . Colin was my life . . . my real life. . . . He was everything that mattered to me . . . all my youth and ideals . . . all my hopes and beliefs . . . and courage belonged to him. . . . And then . . . when there wasn't Colin any more, everything else went—my real life just stopped and everything that was good and lovely in my beliefs didn't matter, didn't exist any more. There didn't seem much of me that mattered left, only just a sort of empty person who had to go on . . . somehow. What does it matter any more?"

"You know it does, Zina."

"Perhaps I do, in a way . . . but I can't be too brave . . . I don't think I could *live* if I didn't *make* nothing matter to me. . . . Don't you under*stand*, Daddy?"

"Yes—I do, my dear . . . that's why—— Can't you . . . *because* of Colin?"

"But he *isn't* any more: that's gone. . . . It's no use pretending and being sentimental—one has to find a possible *modus vivendi*. There isn't religion—for our generation, as there used to be—I mean a quite certain helping religion that explained and alleviated a little. We only have reason left us. And if you begin to reason about the last four years it makes you a little light-headed——"

"Zina, you are making excuses to yourself for what you know is wrong."

"Yes—I do know. But it isn't *so* wrong—and what's right is too—too unbearably negative! When you haven't

any religion or any hell—well, *real* ideals, to live for—there isn't any *absolute* wrong, Daddy. Just small mistakes or successes——"

"Zina—you can still go back——"

"But I don't want to—enough."

"And later—when you regret it——?"

"It'll have filled up time—and I may not——"

"Do you love him at all, Zina?"

"No—he only has a physical attraction for me and the sort of life he leads will keep me occupied. Politics—a certain amount of entertaining——"

"Children——"

She assented: "I suppose so"; she had suddenly an indifference which was almost dislike for the idea: they wouldn't be the sort of funny, delicious children she had once imagined—she felt, with a kind of repulsion, that these others would be usurpers—stolid, unlovely little things whom she wouldn't ever understand——"

Wendy's voice was calling her:

"Yes—I'm in the library!"

Wendy looked round the door.

"Zina, Nanny says will you come up now, before you go and dress and tell her exactly which things you want to take to Paris and which you want sent straight over to Croxtons."

"All right." Zina rose. "Tell her I'm just coming." She bent and kissed her father, laid her cheek against his for a second, and then turned to follow Wendy up to the nursery.

III

"If only it wouldn't rain!" Wendy, in her bridesmaid's dress, stood by the window staring anxiously at the grey skies. She was afraid lest her gold shoes should be spoiled stepping in and out of the car—and she half admitted to herself a superstition relating to the auguries of the climate. "It rained before seven and so it ought to have stopped before eleven," she continued. Cynthia, sitting upright on the sofa, glanced at her watch:

"The Barrett-Saundersons should be here at any moment: they rang up again this morning to repeat that

they would come here so that you and I could drive down to the church with them."

"I can't see why I couldn't wait and come on with Daddy and Zina." Wendy had envisaged the entrance of herself with Zina, her Venetian red dress and Zina's white.

"No, Wendy. You must come with us. Darling, I wish you wouldn't keep looking at yourself in that little mirror."

Wendy slipped the small glass back into her handbag. "The wave of my hair on the right side *would* go wonkish just to-day——"

"I wonder if Zina's ready!" Cynthia got up and began to walk about the room; Wendy felt fussed by her mother's suppressed nervousness.

"Mummie, you ought to sit still until we go. Hello, Daddy!"

Edgar, in a morning coat, carrying a silk hat, had more than ever the air of a general in mufti.

"I have just seen Zina—she will be ready in about five minutes."

"Hans, darling." Cynthia sat down again and beckoned him to sit beside her.

"Cynthia, I wish you would have something hot to drink before you go. Nanny says that you ate no breakfast."

She took his gloves from him and mechanically smoothed out the fingers; he said in an undertone:

"Darling—you must not worry yourself: it may all go well."

He heard the sudden quivering intake of her breath.

"I only hope so, my dear."

He lied, not even because he thought he deceived her, but from the sense that he must at least *try* and reassure her—that he owed even such empty comfort to her pale, sweet dignity.

"I think it may be for the best."

They caught the sound of a car in the drive; and Wendy's clear tones broke in on them:

"*Here* are the Die-Hards!—at *last*."

He met Cynthia's glance with an involuntary smile.

"Die-Hards!" she repeated in an undertone—and he thought her adorable for the quick, whimsical lift of her eyebrows. She left him to go out into the hall and welcome them, bidding Wendy follow her. Old Mr. Barrett-Saunderson, his button-hole (a white camelia) in extreme contrast to his complexion, was all hearty solemnity; his wife, somewhat hesitating, hovered behind him, indicating by her manner that she was conscious of an "occasion" and mildly anxious to be interested.

"Just in time, Lady Renner, just in time—George has gone on, so there's plenty of room for you and this young lady."

Cynthia shook hands with Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson and made an adequate rejoinder to her remarks about the time and the weather.

"I think, perhaps, we should start at once."

Edgar came and helped them into the car. The chauffeur wore a white chrysanthemum and winked at the Renners' parlourmaid in that mood of half-shy, half-sentimental good-humour with which the general public regard a wedding.

Edgar returned into the hall to see Zina coming downstairs: it seemed to him a meaningless display that she should look so lovely, though he perceived a certain hardness, a kind of "unchangefulness" in the effect of her looks, too cool a self-possession in her manner.

"You look well."

She touched her cheek.

"Art and Nature thus allied
Go to make a pretty bride."

She gave him a glance of fleeting humour. "It *is* absurd—setting out on a December morning in these clothes. I feel like Tilburina—stark mad in white satin. Oh, here's the car, I expect we'd better go."

He got in beside her and observed the parlourmaid eyeing Zina's face and dress and veil and bouquet with a fascinated gaze, as though Zina, whom she had waited on at table for the last ten years, were a transfigured and sacred creature. Zina noticed, and said as they drove off:

"Funny, all the servants—even Nanny, you know—look at me as if I were quite a different person to-day. When I woke up this morning the new little second housemaid was gazing down at me with *round* eyes! The lamb prepared for the sacrifice!" she added, half smiling. She pulled down her veil. "What a farcial ritual it all is really. For the first half of the service the bride has to behave as if all her fellow-creatures were mosquitoes and then suddenly she throws back her veil as if the ring was a kind of patent mosquito prophylactic." She went on talking, looking out at the rain-sodden fields and hedges:

"I think I hate the smell of orange-blossom—and lilies are such morbid flowers. Oh, Daddy, button my glove for me"—her hand was trembling. He obeyed and then looked at her gently.

"You must make it a success, Zina—and find happiness."

She nodded. "Yes—I *will* try——" They had reached the village now—cottagers standing at their doors and gaping at them and waving through the rain.

"*What* a queer farce! I suppose they enjoy it all anyway—and Wendy."

Edgar assented. "Yes—I think Wendy is very pleased with her dress and the excitement of the occasion."

"She looks awfully pretty." They were drawing up at the church door, to be received by a cheerful, drenched crowd—old and young women, a few labourers, the postman, a quantity of small urchins.

Edgar handed her out on a soiled strip of red carpet under a mackintosh awning which had been erected between the church porch and the gate of the churchyard. Whispers and admiring comments arose from the crowd.

"Ain't she lovely?"

"Look at 'er *dress!*"

"Ain't 'er silver shoes a treat?"

"The pretty *dear!*"

Zina smiled right and left and slipped her arm through Edgar's.

"It is *queer*," she whispered as they entered the porch and caught the thudding strains of the organ and the mingled scents of flowers and dank stone and furniture

polish and the Sunday clothes of those in the village who had contrived either through prestige or persistence to crowd into the back of the church.

Wendy was waiting for her just inside; she whispered: "Come on, my dear—George has been standing there and looking dignified for *hours*."

The thudding music grew louder and filled the church with its quivering solemnity. Wendy bent quickly and adjusted Zina's train.

"All right, now——"

Edgar felt Zina's hand press more firmly on his arm. As they walked up the aisle, he was aware of how the rows of people, friends, relations, turned in their pews to peer at Zina's profile beneath the cascading veil. He caught sight of old Barrett-Saunderson, very bluff and spruce, of Nanny, on the other side—of Miss Grimmer in a kind of purplish dress, of Cynthia: as he passed her he paused for a second to give her a look of deep and intimate reassurance. George, upright and correct in every inflection of look and dress, awaited their approach without turning round. Edgar thought—"She's right—it *is*—queer—this little, complicated pageant!"

Mr. Grimmer's sing-song and indistinct tones, which had so often in the past provoked the children, especially John and Wendy, to unseemly mirth, began to sound through the church. Mr. Grimmer wore a clean surplice and his pinkish, puckered face assumed an expression habitual to him in the performance of his religious offices, in which anxiety seemed to vie with somnolence.

"*. . . which is an honourable estate and instituted by God in the time of Man's innocency. . . .*"

Zina's left hand played with an end of silver riband from her bouquet.

"*. . . nor taken in hand inadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly to satisfy man's carnal lusts and appetites*——"

Edgar thought how anyway outwardly well-matched they seemed: George tall and handsome—stern-looking on such occasions—Zina so—perhaps this was the rich and elaborate purity of her dress—the filminess of lace and

gleam of satin?—Zina so peculiarly "womanly"—and yet—Edgar's thoughts drifted back to the evening of Christmas Day when she had come back from Croxtons and talked to him—even then he had believed, hoped she might turn back——

". . . Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have for the other, both in prosperity and adversity. . . ."

He wondered, glancing at his daughter, how much she was listening—how far she allowed herself, even if she listened, to realise the meaning of the words. "So many people" (he reflected how many weddings he'd been to and never really "taken in" the service) "must marry in church, without comprehending that the service expresses the ideal of married life?—Cynthia and himself—they hadn't thought about it at the time; only somehow with them it had all been so—wonderful—old Barrett-Saunderson and his wife—poor little lady—— Mr. Grimmer was addressing George:

". . . Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health? . . ."

George's response was made in his clipped, efficient one. Zina's was low and clear:

"I will."

Edgar wondered if she were thinking—he felt her hand still quiver. . . . Then George's tones:

"I, George Rupert, take thee Rosina . . ."

People said words so easily. Half turning, Edgar, out of the corner of his eye, had a glimpse of Wendy, standing, picturesque and self-possessed, clasping her sheath of tiger lilies against the wine red brocade of her dress . . . now George was slipping the ring on to Zina's finger . . . Edgar saw him glance at her as he touched her hand . . . and then repeat more words after Mr. Grimmer. . . .

Now they were kneeling down . . . Edgar wondered if George's leg hurt him . . . he never complained . . . and Mr. Grimmer blessing them:—

". . . and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together. . . ."

There echoed in Edgar's mind the words:

". . . whereof this ring, given and received, is a token and a pledge."

He watched them kneeling together. . . . A token—of what? A pledge of what?—really—for them? Possessiveness and lack of understanding on one side (though George was good—in his way—wouldn't probably be unfaithful or unkind) and on the other side, on Zina's side? No desire to give—merely a kind of listless opportunism, perhaps a certain physical response—no more. Edgar condemned her for it, knew that whatever consequences arose would be supremely *her* fault; but, because she was his daughter and Cynthia's, because he had seen her first crystal happiness shattered by a force she didn't dare to try and comprehend, his love and compassion for her made him, against reason and judgement, blame George for this pitiful waste of what she might have been—of what marriage might have been for her.

The rest of the service seemed to him to pass swiftly and without reality; Mr. Grimmer's sing-song praying . . . the signing in the vestry—the triumphant, curiously emotionalised banality of the "Wedding March" and Zina throwing back her veil and walking down the aisle toward the porch on George's arm—smiling brilliantly and clasping her lilies with an unconscious, clutching nervousness.

It was Wendy who brought him back to a sense that his obligations for the day weren't over yet:

"Come on, Daddy and get back to the house before all the crowd comes out. Mummie's gone back already with the Die-Hards, and she said you were to come soon. Besides I want my lunch—don't you? Nanny's in the car already. *Come* on!"

Wendy talked volubly all the way back to the house—spurred on by the knowledge that Nanny thought she was talking too much:

"I do think Zina looked divinely lovely, didn't you, Nan?"

Nanny nodded. Speech didn't come easily to her at

that moment; it was not what she had hoped Zina's wedding would be.

"Did you see Mr. Grimmer's surplice was beautifully starched for the occasion? I do wish they'd get a new vicar here—he really *is* such a half-wit, and he isn't the slightest good with his parochial work either. Mrs. Dawkins told me" (Wendy had innumerable cronies in the village) "that he's *hope*less when people are ill; he just comes and dithers on the door-step, and when he heard her little girl had measles last year he was so frightened at being expected to visit her that he stayed in the vicarage and pretended to have a cold."

"He *may* have had."

"*No*, Nanny—I know he hadn't, because Mrs. Buzzard does the vicarage washing and she said he didn't send any extra hankies that week! Daddy, *did* you notice Miss Grimmer's dress? I counted the buttons—thirty-one or thirty down the front and five on each sleeve—like those frames for buttoning that Montessori children have! —Oh, how divine to think of lunch. Bridesmaiding's awfully hungry work!" Wendy slapped her stomach with naïve pleasure as the car entered the drive and approached the house. "What time do they leave—George and Zina, I mean?"

"Half-past two from here, isn't it, Sir Edgar?"

"Yes—they have to catch the afternoon boat train from Victoria."

In the hall Zina, standing beside her husband, was smiling, shaking hands, acknowledging congratulations.

Throughout the luncheon, seated between George and his father, she smiled and talked, achieving a sparkling dignity which made George look at her and consider how entirely he had "done the right thing." His speech made at the end of the luncheon, in reply to various toasts, was complacent and adequate—foreshadowing what he believed would be his "parliamentary manner." The occasion seemed to present itself to him as inviting comments on national as well as private affairs, and his congratulations of the victorious British Empire were mingled with the repeatedly expressed consciousness of his own good fortune. He declared himself "proud to be able to celebrate his own good luck at a time when the British Lion had, if he might

use the expression, once more raised its head and asserted its supremacy and the country had emerged from a hard-won victory." (Hear! Hear! from Miss Grimmer, who, unusually elevated by the influence of champagne and the suave compliments of Lady Renner's brother, responded to this appeal to her patriotism.)

". . . he hoped and believed"—and George stood leaning forward, resting the tips of his fingers on the table—"he hoped and believed he would be able in his own small way and with the help of his wife—for ladies are just as much politicians as we men nowadays—to do something to help Britain get back to a normal state after her victory. He felt proud to think that with her help"—he bowed stiffly to Zina at his side—"he might be able to represent the best interests of the county at Westminster, and help to get the affairs of the country going again——" ("Hear! Hear!" from his father.) "And he would like to believe that in the midst of his—er—good luck—he and his wife would remember that this was a time when Englishmen and Englishwomen" ("Hear! Hear!" from Miss Grimmer) "must go on stickin' to their country in peace—as they had in war. There had been, in the last four years, a lot of sacrifice"—Edgar saw Zina's expression of amiable, admiring acquiescence flicker out to blankness—and then met Cynthia's look across the table—(why must this young fool indulge in such unnecessary oratory?)—"a lot of sacrifice—and it is the business of those of us that remain"—he took Zina's hand, preparing to sit down again—"to carry on and look to the future!" The clapping of the twenty guests seated round the table seemed to satisfy him, and he finished his champagne with an air of modest self-possession.

. . . . .

Zina slipped away upstairs to change into her "going away" clothes. Her room which she had known so intimately seemed strange, bereft of her pictures and vases, the familiar furniture—chairs, sofa, tables—was interspersed with agressively new trunks—strapped and labelled. One of the labels, written in Nanny's clear writing, caught her eye:

"Mrs. George Barrett-Saunderson,
Hotel Continental,
Paris."

"Queer . . . unreal . . . that was herself!" She began to take off her veil. A pin which had secured a spray of orange blossom pricked her finger. "Oh, damn"—a tiny drop of blood fell on the front of her dress—"what a bore"—that meant cleaning at once—perhaps Nanny could get it out though. She took off the dress and laid it over a chair with the veil, kicked her silver shoes into a corner. Where was the soap?—she hoped Nanny hadn't packed it—all that shaking hands made one so sticky! She looked in the glass. "Rather good rouge that Wendy had lent her! Wendy! That silly little goose with all her funny expert knowledge about cosmetics and silk stockings. Queer to be leaving *her* too"—Zina took the trees out of her walking shoes—"they *did* go very well with the stockings. Mummie had been wonderfully indefatigable about all the clothes. Someone coming along the passage."

"Hello!"

"I've come to help you." Wendy sat down on a trunk. "Is there anything I can do?"

"There isn't much, darling. Nanny's finished off everything—you can put my frock and veil in the cupboard if you like—they'll have to be sent over to Croxtons afterwards."

"Why, my dear, you've dropped something on it."

"I know—isn't it a bore?—I pricked my finger."

Wendy looked with envy and a certain awe at her sister:

"I *do* think those undies are *too* lovely!"

"Yes—I know."

"You *are* lucky, Zina!"

"Yes."

"You sound awfully blasé."

"I'm not."

"I wish Mummie would get me a coat and skirt like that! Nanny persuades her to keep my things so *frightfully* young."

Zina, combing her hair, said ironically:

"One gets old soon enough."

Wendy sat down again on the trunk and surveyed her sister's reflection in the glass.

"You are *comic*, my dear. Talking about getting old."

"Well, I'm twenty-four."

"Yes. I suppose that *is* only six years from thirty—let me stretch your gloves for you?"

"You'll find the stretchers just inside my dressing-bag—over there, that's right! *Come* in!"

"Please Miss . . . Madam . . ." the small housemaid corrected herself with a shy relish, "the boy wants to take the boxes down."

Zina slipped on her jacket.

"All right—tell him to come in. Come in, Harold."

The youth touched his forelock and stood sheepishly in the doorway.

"Only this trunk and that suitcase. The others are to go over to Croxtons by the cart. I'll bring the small case down myself." She returned to the dressing-table to powder her nose.

"You look *lovely* in that hat, Zina!" Wenny rejoiced in the perfection of Zina's clothes: she was of the opinion that her sister didn't, as a rule, take enough trouble in such matters and was apt to "go on" with old things to avoid the bother of buying new ones.

"Do I?" Zina looked indifferently at her reflection—it mattered so little really. If it had all been different . . . if Colin had been waiting for her downstairs . . . for a second she felt sick and giddy—*God*—how it still hurt!

"Here's your big coat, my lamb!" Nanny came in and looked anxiously at Zina. It made it worse—that Nanny was "understanding"—and Daddy——

Wendy rose. "I'll run down and say you're just coming, and then they can get the confetti ready. I know Miss Grimmer brought some specially in a paper bag." She banged the door behind her.

Nanny waited while Zina took up her gloves and handbag.

"You'll need your coat, my lamb." She held it up for Zina to slip her arms into the sleeves.

"Thank you." Suddenly she turned and threw her arms round Nanny's neck and laid her head on her shoulder.

"Nanny—I *can't* bear it—I *can't*, I *can't*——" She felt herself held closely and gently.

"Hush, my dear—you mustn't say it—— You must be a brave girl and go through with it now. It was your own choosing, my lamb, and it's too late to go back. You must go forward with a brave heart."

Zina forced herself to steadiness.

"I know, Nanny——" she still clung to the reassuring hand. "Yes, Nan—I *will* try——" She kissed her and went out—and Nanny heard her go down the passage and across the landing, and as she reached the top of the stairs, heard the buzz of talk subside in the hall below. Nanny sank down on the chair by the dressing-table and buried her face in her hands. "Almighty God," she prayed, "bless and protect her"—the tears were running down her cheeks—"and bring her happiness and peace. Almighty God, have pity upon her and bring her peace."

IV

Zina lay awake staring into the darkness—listening to the ticking of the small travelling clock by her bedside—to the occasional hoot of a belated taxi crossing the Place de la Concorde—to George's breathing.

She thought, "A week ago I was asleep at home." She envisaged her room as she had so often woken to it—the old creamy panelling and deep windows and curtains patterned with birds and carnations, faded where the sun had touched them. They belonged to the life she had been afraid to stay in—because of its emptiness. She reached out her hand and switched on the lamp—"Ten past four!" The ornate pomposity of her surroundings, the pseudo-Louis XVI furniture, the gilt framed mirrors, the oppressive chandelier, loomed round her—gave her the sense of being in a peculiarly luxurious mausoleum—but then all hotel rooms . . .

She turned to look at George—her finger on the switch of the lamp lest he should begin to stir. His face, sunk in the pillow, was towards her, bronzed and immobile in the shaded light. She regarded him—the square, narrow forehead, the closed eyelids with their fringe of short thick lashes, the blunt, regular nose and chin, the complacent,

insensitive lips firmly closed below the brown moustache —with the sense, that had never yet left her, of his being a stranger—of his being someone—a man whom she really didn't know at all—with whom she hadn't any understanding.

Watching him now, she was perhaps mildly sorry for him—wondered at herself for being spasmodically enslaved by an attraction which wasn't even æsthetic—of the higher senses. She gave a little shudder—honestly and curiously amazed at herself—"a mere animalism—a kind of sensuality whose pleasure wasn't even intoxicating——" She knew with a pitying tolerance, which hadn't yet any resentment in it, that for him it was different; that he wasn't, even to the desire to regulate the least details of her life, "indifferent"; that for him physical possessions had a moral and mental significance—made him regard her as so intimately his property that his pride was involved in her clothes and words and actions, making him demand in her—already in six days this had become apparent, a perfection (at his standard) of appearances and opinions which should somehow symbolise the "rightness" of their marriage. If he found her more ready to accept his caresses than his views, he appeared indulgent and, momentarily, when his senses obscured his criticism, pleased; but Zina was aware that his determination (which presented to him in words as an "aim" would have seemed "perfect nonsense" and even shocking) was ultimately to possess her mind and soul; and she saw herself "adapting" and "agreeing" for the sake of peace until he believed that he had won—until, perhaps, he *had*.

He stirred in his sleep and she jerked out the light with a nervousness that struck her a second later as absurd. In the dark he seemed more—more inevitably "there" —less possible merely—to "consider" him being there.

Strange—how they spent their days—lunching, dining, theatres, seeing people (George had various friends—at the Embassy and on a Military Commission—who were in Paris). Queer for a honeymoon. Closing her eyes, Zina was thankful that they weren't alone together all day with nothing to do. This—the rush and glamour, the shopping, was anyway—she thought of Wendy's word—"amusing."

. . . . .

They lunched the next day with Charles Chase and his wife; or rather, they lunched primarily with Mrs. Chase, for the flat was hers, and the occasion (as did all occasions at which she was present) seemed to centre upon her.

Charles Chase was a first cousin of George's, and hearing that the Barrett-Saundersons were in Paris, had telephoned that his wife and he would be awfully pleased, etc.; Charles had been at school with George—had been in the same regiment and was in appearance a fairer and more boyish edition of his cousin. He had the same clipped way of speaking, though he didn't in his utterances aspire to "say anything much"—and was socially content to be good mannered, not too bad at golf and fairly well dressed. He had been badly off until he married Hope Bretherton, whom he met when he was on leave in 1916, in Paris, where she had equipped a hospital on her considerable fortune.

She had an "appartement" in the Faubourg St. Honoré, into which Charles had settled with her since his demobilisation in December—and where he played the piano and provided cocktails for his friends (and these were many and on the whole pleasant), while she continued to supervise her hospital during the day, and to dance and go to parties with him at night.

Zina found her charming—a half-sophisticated, half-infantile charm, which was wholly conscious and backed by a flawless self-confidence. She welcomed Zina, clasping her hand and looking up at her with a speculative but quite unenthusiastic expression. Hope Chase had eyes like a kitten, big, wide apart, set rather flat in her small sallow face, bluish-grey in colour, and always open.

"I'm glad you could come——" Her American accent was more drawl than inflection. "How d'you do, Major? Now, if you're both ready, we'll go right in to luncheon."

They followed her slight, slouching figure—she moved badly in her exquisite clothes.

"What an *adorable* room!"

"Do you like it?" Mrs. Chase glanced round indifferently. "Will you sit here on my right, Major?—and Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson here? Yes, I just love it," she remarked to Zina as they sat down. I had a man make this yellow lacquer set for me—I was getting tired to death

of all this French furniture—and I had yellow walls and the dull jade curtains to go with it—then I can just endure the grey views outside."

Charles Chase looked admiringly at his wife. "Of course, I think Hope ought to do a furnishing business of her own—she has such marvellous ideas."

George committed himself: "I like the steel fireplace—it must have been a job to get that done over here——"

"Well—I just worried until I got it done—you only have to make people understand exactly what you want——"

"If you *can*——" her husband remarked: it was obvious that he regarded each of her actions or achievements as a *tour de force.*

She smiled—her least charming expression: her broad, nervous mouth, dabbed with a dark red lip salve, had a certain sweetness of line when she was serious, but when she smiled, her teeth, though white and regular, seemed too emphatic for her fragile face and dominated it by an expression which was too definite, too cheerful—as incongruous to her countenance as would have been a scarlet waist-belt on her black supple dress; it made the onlooker wish she would "take it off."

"I believe"—she appealed to Zina—"that one can always impose a superior understanding on an inferior one."

Zina felt she was being greeted on a platform of intellectual equality and wasn't, perhaps, adequately showing her colours. She hesitated.

"That *should* be the case, of course, but I think one rather finds—at any rate in general—that opinion is formed from below."

"You mean—public opinion?"

"Yes—the inferior understandings win by sheer quantity."

"Public opinion is made by the Press, I'm afraid." George shook his head. "For instance, in England the working man gets some poisonous Socialist paper——"

Zina interrupted gently: "But, George—the Socialists must feel the same about—the 'poisonous' Tory papers!"

"Exactly." Mrs. Chase gave a pained look at her husband when he laughed, and turned to George, as if to

await with concentrated and impartial judgment whatever should be said next.

George ignored Zina's protest. "Those papers preach sedition——"

Mrs. Chase's look was restrainedly interested under the swerving shadow of her hat.

"But people should hear all sides and judge for themselves—since their opinion *has* to count in government."

Charles, who inclined to agree with George, defended his wife.

"Hope is so enormously broad-minded."

Mrs. Chase's kitten eyes met Zina's.

"Well—I sincerely hope I *am*," the subject began to bore her.

"Tell me, Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson, just what you've been seeing in Paris."

She listened to Zina's account of plays—of where they'd dined—and with whom—with an attentive air and occasional comments which she emphasised with an inclination of her head.

"Why, yes—I suppose Montmartre is always amusing, especially to foreigners." Mrs. Chase, almost unconsciously, assumed for herself the status of a Parisian, an assumption, perhaps, justifiable, for she had the facility for assimilating the essence of any *milieu* or nation in which she lived, without losing, by this assimilation, any of her own aloof and rather special quality. It wasn't a matter of language, for she spoke French with fluent incorrectness, nor of clothes, for she made her own "style," nor of observation, for she wasn't, on account of a kind of dazzle of egoism, clearly observant or deductive from what she saw: rather it was a power, born of her unblinking self-confidence, which enabled her to feel, and therefore almost to impose, on others that she *was* Parisian—when she wished to be—or English, when she felt especially stirred by her husband's nationality, or finely and freely American when she was touched by retrospection about her native land; and there had been a time, when she first came to Europe as a young widow, just before the war, when she had had a Palazzo in Venice—and a gondola—and living alone, had become by the contemplation of Titian and

the reading of Henry James—and Castiglione (with a dictionary)—rarely and romantically Venetian.

More and more, as she talked—of politics—of books—of art—exhibiting a superficial yet eclectic knowledge and taste, she made on Zina the impression of a woman who had, by some peculiar dispensation, a right to be "considered" and to feel herself considered. And Zina wondered how much of her "specialness" was derived, by innumerable subtle channels of purchasable power and taste and experience, from money—and what was, in Hope Chase, essentially distinction?

The conversation turned to her hospital. George asked how much longer she would keep it going. She offered Zina a match and then lit her own cigarette.

"Perhaps another year even. As long as I'm needed."

"You don't do nursing yourself, do you, Mrs. Chase?"

She looked at him, absently almost.

"I *did*—until just a few months ago—and then I had a kind of a—breakdown (my nerves aren't too strong and that big Bertha business shook me up rather), and since then I only supervise and make any alterations I like—and my matron runs it for me."

Zina asked: "D'you have all sorts of cases?"

"Oh, yes—everything—surgical, shell-shock—I think they're the worst."

"The shell-shock cases?"

She nodded. "They're like babies a lot of them—their nerves all gone to pieces, and even their memories gone. I had a man there until quite lately and his wife came to see him every day and he didn't know her. Terrible for her!" The bluish-grey eyes retained their look of indifference and she knocked some ash off into her coffee cup.

Zina shivered. "Awful—for her. Did he regain his memory in the end?"

"Yes—it gradually came back."

George remarked: "Paris must have been pretty unhealthy for a woman to be in the last part of the war."

Charles agreed emphatically. "I was pretty glad, in a way, when Hope *did* have a breakdown and had to go off to the South for a bit. It was jumpy work for me when I was stuck in Flanders to think she might be shelled at any moment."

Mrs. Chase seemed unaware of any peculiar delightfulness or irony in the remark. Zina suspected her of not realising that her husband was a *darling*.

"Well, I think what I hated most was the darkness," she said. "You couldn't see an inch to get about at night, and some nights it would take me the whole of a half hour to get back here from the hospital—and I'd sit there, with the car crawling along, absolutely wanting to scream aloud." She lifted her hand with a tremulous, nervous gesture, so that her sleeve fell back, disclosing a thin white wrist.

"Shall you stay on in Paris when this hospital shuts up? . . . No, thanks." Zina refused another cigarette.

"I don't know—I'll probably keep on this flat—but I may take Charles over to New York for a while—or go to England with him. But I've got the work-craze, you know, and I don't think I'll be able to give it up. I have the feeling that there's so much that I can do." Her tone wasn't either sanctimonious or eager; she rather indifferently stated a fact. She got up.

"Come on in the next room and Charles 'll play to us."

They returned to the drawing room and she went and opened the piano. "By the way, Charles," she remarked, "I had this tuned for you—it was getting terrible."

"Hope, you are marvellous, darling. It's exactly what I've meant to do for weeks."

She laid her hand on his shoulder as he sat down.

"Play some of those Russian songs I ordered for you last week—that that girl sang—you remember——"

She moved away from the piano, with her slouching, indefinite walk, and sat down beside Zina.

"Do you sing, Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson?"

"I used to—I had lessons when I first grew up, but I've more or less dropped it."

"What a pity! Now aren't these beautiful?"

Charles played well, with a sensibility and depth which Zina found surprising: she observed George leaning back in his chair and listening politely; when his cousin paused he remarked:

"Very nice, Charles—give us another!" and shut his mouth again, a trick which Zina knew and which gave an air of finality to his most trivial utterances.

Charles played again—a queer twanging melody that seemed to rise and fall on a scale of sobs. When he stopped Zina murmured:

"What a heartrending thing!"

Mrs. Chase's kitten eyes were fixed on nothingness.

"Yes—isn't it? Seems to hold all the beauty and indiscipline and pathos of Russia in it——"

Charles suddenly began to play the "Madelon." She held up her hand.

"Now, my dear boy, *don't*—you know that upsets me." He stopped and she turned to Zina. "It's so dreadfully reminiscent of the war to me! All the Poilus, all the soldiers—English and French, used to sing it. Is there anything you would specially like?"

Zina glanced at her watch.

"Well, as a matter of fact I have a manicure appointment at three—so I'm afraid we ought to be——"

Mrs. Chase inclined her head, "Very well"—she rose, taking Zina's hand. "I'm sorry you've got to go now: you must come again. Unfortunately I've got to leave Paris to-morrow for a week—but if you're still here——"

George regretted: "But Charles must bring you to stay with us this summer."

"Yes—*do* come—please."

"Well—I will certainly try—but I'm doubtful if I shall be free for a time. Anyway, au revoir, Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson—au revoir, Major!" She met their parting glances with her wide, indifferent look and then lit herself another cigarette.

Zina reflected, as they descended in the lift, "What a lot of power she's got, in a way," and envisaged her, as she had seen her a minute ago, the small figure and fragile, sallow face with the big eyes and broad, carelessly reddened mouth.

"I suppose Charles married her for her money," George remarked, and took Zina's elbow as they crossed the street to capture a taxi. The man, after eyeing them, condescended to stop.

"By the way—what street's your coiffeur——" He handed her in.

"Rue des Petits Champs."

"Rue des Petits Champs—et pas trop vite!"
"Bien."
George climbed in after her and the taxi started at its normal reckless speed.

V

WAHRINGERSTRASSE VIa, WIEN.
January 8, 1919.

LIEBER EDGAR,

Yesterday I received your letter of January 2nd with all your news and all your kind and good wishes and intentions for my welfare.

And so your "Zina" is married, and you tell me he is a good man, though the one that she loved is dead. It is not possible for me to say what I feel for you and your family. When I received your first letter after the Armistice, telling me how your son had been killed I have thought that it must be difficult for you to associate yourself any more even with myself (since we have not met for so many years) because surely it is hard in your case to look without prejudice on "enemy relations," and the fact that your loss and suffering have not altered your judgment that we "are all and none of us" to blame for these last four years deepens my respect for that quality that you have always had, the great tolerance that comes from a profound kindness and a profound judgment.

You say to me will I not leave Wien and come and live with you in England, and I am so grateful to you and touched by your generosity; but all the same I have determined to stay here, where, although I am now an old man, I can be useful in some ways to the friends of my whole life. For now that material comforts and resources hardly exist, friendship and companionship is a very great help, and even in the kitchen here we have sometimes guests (though we cannot give them anything to eat, no potato or bread, because then there would be no breakfast for us to-morrow), and we sit and talk together and make some of the dark, bitter evenings pass in this way.

Companionship is not only good, but it is necessary in such a condition to keep men sane, otherwise they must sit and think and think how they are going to live, and how

their families can live, and what they will be able to get to eat to-morrow. Perhaps it is also a kind of sentimentality, but I feel that I cannot leave my city and my friends when they are in such terrible distress.

As a nation it appears to me that if we are to be saved it must be by one of two courses, either by the Entente or by Germany, for at present our condition is without hope.

Soon I will write to you again and meanwhile I will wait with such joy for your letters. I am glad to hear that your business becomes again better. Here there are no books published at all, and the printing presses are as idle as all our other machinery. Give my heartfelt greetings to your wife and to your daughters (I suppose that the younger one is also "growing up" as you say in English now!)

'lways your loving brother,

ALFRED VON RENNER.

VI

"Hans—I wish you'd tell me exactly how badly off we're going to be!"

Edgar hesitated. "It is difficult to say—exactly. When we have sold this place—we shall have enough to live in the flat in London—I only mean that we shall not be 'well-off' any more, my darling."

"I see." She knew his solicitude was primarily for her—and half-smiled. "Hans—you are funny. Did you think I should look upon this as a tragedy?"

"I was afraid you would worry."

"And that's why you didn't tell me until now—after the wedding?"

"Yes."

"You give me credit for very little sense of proportion."

"It is serious though, Cyntia: it will make a very great difference—in many ways."

"You talk as if we hadn't been quite badly off when we were first married——" Her tone softened. "Hans, I refuse to let you worry, my dear!"

"It will mean giving up so much that you love, Cyntia; the house, the garden—many of the pictures perhaps."

"Do you think I'm a slave to possessions, darling?"

He shook his head. "We all are—a little. And I have

thought that perhaps we shall both mind—for Wendy." As he spoke he wondered whether he wasn't letting a sentimental tendency, which he recognised as apt to influence his judgment, prevent his accurate forecast of just how the change would affect Wendy. In this case Cynthia was more perspicuous.

"Wendy will love to be in London more: she doesn't really like the country for itself—only for the tennis and riding and swimming—and I don't think she suffers much from sentimental associations. She's extraordinarily *un*-attached to possessions—except her clothes and personal setting."

"Probably you are right. All the same it is a pity. I think surroundings have a great effect on the character—and she is already so much inclined to be restless and to think that she always must be distracted."

"She'll be able to be with Zina, at Croxton's, quite a lot, I hope."

Edgar picked up a postcard from Zina which was lying beside him on the writing-table.

"Yes," he said slowly, "that will be good for both of them."

"What does she say?"

"That she and George will arrive home to-morrow evening and that she hopes we and Wendy will have dinner with them on Tuesday evening."

"Tuesday would be all right."

Cynthia put down her knitting.

"Hans?" She tapped absently with a knitting needle on the arm of her chair.

"Yes, my dear?"

"Hans—do you think, from the letters we've had, that she's happy?"

He spared her as much as he could.

"I do not think she is *un*happy."

"What a verdict—on *our* daughter, Hans!" Her voice broke to a whisper. "She's so hard—still."

He tried to reassure her, though the thing was an incessant burden on his own consciousness.

"She's not so hard as she wants to appear, I think—and in some way surely she must find happiness."

"With *him?*"

"You used to *like* him," he said gently.

"He was adequate—as a guest—in fair weather. didn't look deeper—then!"

"Do you dislike him now?"

"N-no—only he doesn't seem to fit in with Zina in the least. It's so terribly clear that she married him because——"

"Because?"

"As a solution."

Edgar still fought, for Cynthia's sake, with his own fundamental doubts.

"Perhaps it may become one."

She said vehemently: "I don't believe there are solutions like that—it's calling a drug a remedy."

This time he couldn't answer. Glancing at his wife it became for him part of her lovableness that she should have taken their loss of money as almost trivial and refused to let it affect her sense of what was really, though to an outside point of view rather obscurely, wrong with their family affairs. He wondered—"Does she perhaps not realise what changes this will make——" and deliberately reverted to the subject.

"At least Zina is provided for, my dear."

She turned on him with a swift, incredulous demand.

"Hans—you don't *mean* what you hint by saying that? That just for the sake of her having money—and comfort——"

"Not just for the sake of, my dearest—but those things *have* their value."

"But relatively they're nothing—relative to what's right—to marrying the right person."

"But, Cyntia, we must remember that the one that Zina believed to be the right person——"

"There might have been another——"

"Only sometimes that is so—and it needs a great courage to wait. We must try and see, Cyntia, from her point of view. Whatever has happened to us later, we have had our youth and our happiness unspoiled, and we have had long years of peace; and what has come, now, we have been able to suffer together. But for Zina, and for many

of her generation, there has been no—fulfilment. They were brought up in that security that we had always known —to expect the same gifts of life as we have had, to expect the happiness that comes from love and friendship and the complicated and beautiful employment of leisure—and suddenly—they are disinherited—through a blind force which they cannot understand—which plays havoc with their world and their beliefs and all their conception of life—and all their hopes and plans. Everything is destroyed round them—the young men—those who are still living have been maimed, not only bodily but, it must be, often in soul, have seen their friends killed and have felt their whole lives spoiled: and the girls"—he took Cynthia's outstretched hand—"they have grown into womanhood to know their brothers and lovers killed—taken away from them without warning and, it must seem, without sense or justification, so that their ideals are perhaps destroyed with their happiness. We cannot blame Zina, my dear."

"No, I know, only it does seem so hopeless for her."

"Perhaps we cannot judge altogether."

"They were so beautifully happy—Colin and Zina—it was all so natural and young and full of hope. I found that drawing the other day that Colin did of John as an Austrian officer."

"It is strange——" Edgar remembered that afternoon —all of them sitting round the tea-table on the lawn. Colin at Zina's feet—and John making plans to go to Dinard—and Wendy in her floppy hat and blue frock.

She continued: "And that's only five years ago next July." Then abruptly she changed the subject. "Hans —when do we leave this house?"

"I have had an offer for it from a man who wants to move in in April."

"Who is he?"

"A man who made his money in the war. He has not a prepossessing appearance and he tells me very often that he has four cars for which he must find room."

"The new Merchant Princes."

"Exactly—the rising 'Medicis.' I have seen his wife: she wore a sable coat and she yawned in my face and winked to emphasise her meaning."

"And they're going to live here; where our children grew up—and bring all their ugly children——"

"Perhaps they haven't any."

She gave a wry little smile. "I'm sure they have, Hans (*dozens* with adenoids and flat greasy hair). And they'll sleep in all these lovely rooms and walk about in the woods where Zina and John used to play Red Indians. Hans, I hate it for that—leaving here."

"My dear—my dear, I know——"

She broke in with a sweet, consoling gentleness: "But that's *all*, Hans, darling. And that's simply sentimentality. They can't take it away from us or really spoil all these lovely years we've had here——" she laughed reflectively. "The new Medici!"

They heard the sound of horse's hoofs on the drive outside. Cynthia rose and opened the window. "It's only Wendy back from her ride!"

Wendy, flushed and laughing, reined up her horse outside.

"Oh, my *dears*, I've had such a heavenly gallop. We came right across the fields from Cox's Farm—and Prince actually took both ditches without shying!" She reined the animal closer to the window. "Have you both been sticking indoors all the afternoon?"

Edgar rose and joined Cynthia at the window.

"Wendy—your tone towards your ageing parents——"

"But, darling daddy, we're all 'ageing' all the time!"

"Imp!"

She bent to caress the horse's steaming shoulders. "I wish you'd take up riding again, Mum! You might now the war's finished. . . ."

Cynthia glanced at Edgar—it seemed such a shame to say anything now—to present such a fragment of sordid fact to this laughing, quick-breathing Amazon; but Edgar nodded—and she said almost apologetically:

"Darling, I'm afraid *you* may have to give it up—for a time."

"Why the devil?" She stared from one to the other of her parents.

Edgar regarded her pretty, astonished countenance and remarked, with a certain humour which struck his daughter

as misplaced, that he was afraid that he had lost rather a lot of money.

Wendy looked at him accusingly. "How?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The business hasn't been very remunerative during the war—much of our money has been invested abroad—and all that I had in Austria is naturally gone. Also I have heard yesterday from your Uncle Alfred again and it appears he has nothing at all left."

"Good lord! And you mean we shall have to support him? Steady, Prince!" She drew the slackened reins tighter.

"Yes, that is what has finally decided me to leave here, although I have known for some time——"

Wendy glanced at her mother's calm, sweet face. "We aren't *ruined*, are we?" That at least held a faint thrill.

Edgar laughed. "No, mien kind—it is not so startling as that. We are no longer well off—that is all."

"Where shall we live, then?" The vision of being romantic refugees, selling their jewels from town to town—or being redeemed by Wendy's premature and prodigious success in revue—faded.

"In London—in the flat."

"Oh, that'll be rather a joke. Does Nanny know?"

Cynthia answered: "Your father told Nanny before he told me—in case she should censor the news as unfit for me! Only of course she was sensible and told him he was making a fuss about nothing."

Wendy protested with a solemnity which she felt her parents lacked.

"But, my dears—it isn't 'nothing!' to lose one's money."

Cynthia, afraid lest Wendy's superficial pathos should seem to Edgar a reproach, replied with some of her old high-handed manner:

"Well, don't let's anyway think it tragic or romantic or interesting—because it isn't. It's only a mild change of circumstance."

Wendy was baffled and annoyed: she was beginning to wonder what the change *would* mean.

"Well, I must take Prince back to the stables"—she trotted soberly down the drive. Cynthia shut down the window again.

"Poor Wendy—I'm afraid she's going to mind. I must go up and talk to Nanny about changes of domestic arrangements. We *can't* have more than one servant in the flat when we're all there—even if we could afford it. There's only just room for you and Nanny and Wendy and me——"

She was half-way upstairs when he heard her call.

"Oh, Hans—*you* go and answer the telephone——"

He hurried across the hall to his study.

"Hello! Oh, a telegram?" He took up the pencil attached to the block by the instrument. "Yes? To whom? *Miss* Rosina Renner—Miss? All right—yes?" He wrote down the words mechanically, dictated by the high nasal voice over the wire:

"Zina—darling—come—at—once—hospital——" There followed an address in Paris: "Signature," said the high nasal voice, "C—O—L—I—N. C for cat, O for orange, L for London. . . ."

Edgar banged down the receiver.

VII

The nun's gaze seemed to modify the severity of her words:

"Vous savez, m'sieur que ce n'est pas permis de visiter les malades le matin." She spoke with a thick friendly Alsatian accent. Edgar accepted the verdict.

"Alors . . . à quelle heure . . . ?"

She stood in meditation, her hands crossed over the ample black folds of her robe.

"C'est ce jeune Monsieur Russell que vous desirez voir, M'sieu?"

Edgar nodded.

"Je suis venu de l'Angleterre——"

Her candid look comprehended the gravity of such a journey.

"Et vous êtes pressé?" A little line appeared between her eyebrows and she detained him with a gesture.

"Eh bien, j'rai demander."

She seemed to be communing with herself and to arrive at a decision: "Alors, M'sieu, ayez la bonté d'attendre ici un moment." She indicated a bench against the wall of the bare parquet-floored little hall. "J'rai voir——"

"Je vous remercie, ma sœur." Edgar sat down, and heard her light, even steps recede along the corridor.

The blankness of his surroundings—white walls and doors—the aroma of beeswax and anæsthetics in the atmosphere, intensified his feeling of being in a dream; of having, since yesterday morning when he had received that telephone message, struggled through a confusion of arrangements and small decisions and acts (somehow keeping up an appearance, somehow accomplishing a journey and finding an hotel)—of having been jolted through all this by a volition not entirely his own—to this final unreal impeccable place; and looking back over the last twenty-fours hours, he knew that he had thought and reasoned—and made himself think and reason—and that possibilities and conjectures had worked round and round in his mind, and dizzied all orderly powers of thought by their number and confusion and ceaselessness—that out of all this straining, aching turmoil of conjecture and fear—of what had been—and what might be—now, no reassurance had emerged for him on which to rebuild some kind of equanimity. Nothing had become clear for him except the impression of that first flare of news yesterday morning, leaving him half-blinded, to grope against this volcanic flood of possibility. . . . "Colin . . . was alive; and Zina . . . "

The nun was returning—and as she approached he read in her look that she found him pitiful, and realising his own shaking hand resting on his stick, he comprehended the comment behind that naïve compassionate gaze. "Pauvre vieillard!"

"J'ai demandé, M'sieu, si vous pourriez visiter ce Monsieur 'Russell'"—she pronounced it "Roussell"—"et Madame a dit que oui—et qu'elle viendra tout à l'heure."

"'Madame,' ma sœur?"

"Vous ne savez pas? C'est à Madame cette Hôpital" —the sister stepped back with an air of simple deference. "Ah—la voilà!"

Edgar rose at the approach of a small figure in a white nursing uniform.

"You're Sir Edgar Renner, are you not? Your telegram reached us last night." The tones had a very faintly

American inflection. He felt himself surveyed indifferently but adequately out of wide-open blue-grey eyes. "I'm Mrs. Chase—and this is my hospital."

"It is very good of you, Mrs. Chase, to permit me . . . "

"Why, not at all. Of course we have regulation visiting hours, but under special circumstances . . . " She turned to the sister with a nod of dismissal.

"Vous pouvez en aller, ma sœur."

The nun blinked gently at Edgar and departed.

"Perhaps I had better give you a little information about Mr. Russell before you see him." She made a sign to Edgar to sit down, and sat down beside him on the bench.

"I should be very glad if you would. I did not know—until yesterday morning—that he was living."

She nodded. "That's terribly strange for you, then . . . By the way, I conclude you're a relation. All *I* knew was that he wired to England to someone and got the answer last night."

"I am . . . a very old friend: I knew him when he was . . . quite young, very well indeed . . . "

"I see." The misty wide-open eyes seemed to darken with the shadows of thoughts.

"I see. . . . And you . . . no one . . . had an idea he was alive . . . naturally."

"He was reported missing—believed killed—in March, 1915. You can tell me, perhaps . . . "

She sat with her small, nervous hands clapsed over one knee.

"Well—of course I only know the bare outlines."

"He's all right?"

The frail, rather sallow face, framed by the soft white veil, was turned towards him.

"Oh, yes—he's all right—now—though, of course, he's weak still——" She checked herself as though she was sinking into a reverie. "I'll tell you just exactly what I know of the case, Sir Edgar." Her passionless, faintly sing-song voice summed up:

"The Germans found him badly gassed and took him prisoner. They took him to one of their dressing stations—this is just what he told me—and forgot about him for a bit and gave him nothing to eat or drink. Then he got put

on a truck and taken along the line and then someone mistook him for dead and threw him out somewhere at night with a lot of dead bodies. He spent nearly two days there and then he supposes somebody must have found him, nearly raving mad, and he got taken to a hospital somewhere behind the German lines. Well, Sir Edgar—he got a bit better from the gassing, then they sent him back to Germany to a prison camp where the men were dying like flies from a typhoid epidemic. This wasn't very good treatment for him because what was really wrong with him was very bad shell-shock and the atmosphere of such a camp was not exactly peaceful. Apparently the shell-shock took him that way that he'd absolutely lost his memory and he hadn't an idea of *who* he was or what his *name* was, or anything that ever happened to him before he got gassed during the German attack when he was taken prisoner."

Edgar breathed: "Now I understand—good God!"

The passionless tones continued: "Well—by some miracle he *didn't* get typhoid and they moved him on to another camp—some place in the North of Prussia where they weren't so badly looked after. Most of the prisoners' parcels got through there from home, so he was able to have some of what the other prisoners gave him."

"Was he—able to go about all this time?"

"Well—it seems he didn't ever feel exactly strong—but he wasn't really an invalid except for his nerves. Mostly 'shell-shocks' can't sleep properly, you know—their nerves are absolutely all to pieces; and his case was particularly bad—I gather he was sort of stunned half the time. They had a queer life there, theatricals and card-playing and rigging up shops and clubs like a lot of children."

"And how did he come here—to your hospital?"

"Oh, he's only been here three weeks. Some time last Summer, when he was still in that camp, he had another 'break-down' and I think they thought he was going mad or something. Anyway they exchanged him to Switzerland—naturally they knew he was an English officer, though he couldn't tell them his name."

"But, Mrs. Chase, he must have had a pocket-book, letters."

The big kitten-eyes met his again. "He had everything, including his watch, taken from him that time he was left as dead."

Edgar had a sense of being stranded in an antechamber of Eternity, in this white place with this small woman in her white uniform. His promptings of her narration seemed to say themselves mechanically.

"Did they transfer him then to a *hospital* in Switzerland?"

"Yes—he was in some kind of a home in Zürich. A brain and nerve specialist there heard of his case and took it up—as being special, you know, because of his absolute loss of memory. I believe they tried every kind of thing—suggestion and hypnotism and all sorts of very elaborate treatments which did no good. However, he was better fed there, and that restored him physically to some extent, and they gave him sleeping draughts. Then about a month ago the Zürich specialist was here in Paris, and he spoke about your friend's case to a colleague here who happens to attend other cases in my hospital. Well, *my* doctor suggested that the case should be sent here for *him* to study, because the Zürich man admitted he had failed to bring back the memory. And I happened to be able to take him in at that time——"

"Then your—specialist—has succeeded?"

"Well, no—I have to admit, or rather *he* has to admit, that nobody did a definite 'cure.' He just seemed to *get* back his memory two days ago—quite suddenly. The doctors tells me that of course can *always* happen, if you're lucky—that the memory comes back in a few hours for no particular reason."

"And does he suddenly remember all that has been blank in his mind until two days ago?"

"Everything. Until Friday if you talked to him he couldn't think back any farther than just after he was taken prisoner, and every now and then he'd look blank and puzzled, and of course he hadn't got a name—we simply knew him by the number of his ward."

"He has a private ward?"

"Why, yes—we always give private rooms to shell-shock cases."

"And is he up?"

"Yes—the difficulty of staying *still* is the trouble with these sort of cases."

"But is he quite normal now?"

The penetration of her next remark surprised him.

"I've got so into the habit until he got back his memory and his name of thinking of him as a case that I've been giving you the feeling that there's something queer about him——" She rose. "There isn't any more. It's a most marvellous, natural cure. Of course his nerves aren't likely to be *perfect* for a time—but he's not a 'case' any more. You'd better come and see."

Edgar followed her along the corridor and up the rubber carpeted staircase. She remarked without glancing over her shoulder:

"I told him I'd bring you up——"

Edgar wondered how she appeared to Colin as an authority. It was apparent that as a "case" she had found Colin interesting.

She knocked at a door.

"Come in——"

She nodded to Edgar.

"I'll probably see you before you go"—and turned away as if in abrupt and complete indifference.

Edgar opened the door for himself and walked in.

VIII

His first, most startling impression was that Colin *hadn't* changed: that the slender boyish figure which turned so eagerly to meet him, the straight, sweet look that met his . . . were still . . . were still—Colin—as he *had* been: and this unexpected sameness gripped and unnerved Edgar—as being more pitiful, more poignant and unbearable in relation to the whole situation, past and present, than any change to hardened manhood, any ravaged maturity could be.

"Colin——"

Edgar's husky tone expressed some fragment of his immense, terrible pity.

"Oh, *God*, it is queer—to see you, sir——"

Edgar could feel him vibrate as he took his hand: his

greenish eyes seemed to hold a hungry gladness. "Oh, *God*, it is queer."

Shakily his courtesy reasserted itself.

"Do please sit down, sir." He pulled an armchair toward the fireplace, and as he turned to the light Edgar saw that he was pale with daubs of shadow beneath his eyes and below his cheekbones and faint lines at the corners of his mouth.

"Thank you for wiring last night. I—suppose the wire reached you at Pelham?" He stood looking down at Edgar with that awful luminous eagerness.

For a second Edgar shut his eyes . . . that he should have to tell him!

"Yes—it came—yesterday morning."

He looked up again at Colin and saw the tears pouring down his cheeks.

" . . . Forgive me . . . for being such—such a fool!" He sobbed—and turned to bury his head in his arms on the mantelpiece. . . . I'm rather . . . shaky still. . . . You know I . . . oh, God! . . . I'm so terribly happy. I don't know how to . . . to begin to ask you . . . about her!"

Edgar sat silent and rigid: the sobs went on, easily and ceaselessly—as though they would never stop.

Now they grew less frequent—and Edgar still waited, gazing at the helpless figure against the mantelpiece. . . . At last the sobbing subsided . . . and Colin, steadying himself, turned on him an exhausted, brilliant glance.

"I'm immensely sorry. This happens to me sometimes—it doesn't mean anything. But it's so . . . " He harped back to the word as though, however inadequately, it implied a little what he felt. " . . . so queer . . . so uncanny. I expect you know. I imagine Mrs. Chase or one of the sisters explained to you. I only got back a whole section of my memory"—he smiled—"on Friday. It's the most . . . the most curious thing. I'd absolutely forgotten my whole world and surroundings . . . before I was taken prisoner." He was playing nervously with a cigarette holder. " . . . Even my name. An absolute blank . . . although every now and then I had a sensation that there was a great deal—that I just couldn't

get at . . . " He still spoke a little jerkily. " . . . Like dim things moving behind banks of mist . . . and just when you thought they were becoming distinct—it grew opaque again—like a blank fog——"

"And then, Colin . . . it came all at once back to you?"

Edgar thought: "*How* can I tell him. Won't it break him up altogether . . . the shock?" But somehow he would find out—and have to know.

"Yes—quite: as if you'd been amongst those thick mists for an infinity of time—and then suddenly they roll away—and you see perfectly clearly. . . ." For a second he hesitated—still twirling the cigarette holder between his fingers, and to Edgar, the young strained face —the luminous eager eyes gazing down at him, became an accusation.

"Tell me, sir . . . have you . . . brought *her?*"

Edgar's glance became riveted on those restless fingers.

"No. . . ."

The fingers were still.

"I suppose she couldn't get away so easily?" The fingers moved jerkily and were still again.

"No. . . . She is . . . occupied."

Colin's voice had a quivering discord.

"What . . . with what . . . sir?"

"Colin . . . Zina is . . . things have changed . . . they must change, in four years. . . ."

The grasp of the cigarette holder tightened and was held rigid.

"You mean. . . ."

"Zina is married."

Something dropped on the floor—tack—and rolled under Edgar's chair. When he looked up, for a second he wondered if Colin . . . had understood.

"She is married to . . ."

Colin cut him short. "I don't want to hear, thanks." He spoke tonelessly, his face inexpressive. . . .

Edgar got up and walked to the window and came back once more to Colin . . . and his first dread that the news might break him up again was dulled by his steady glance.

His stillness, his restraint, contrasted almost terribly with the helpless sobbing five minutes before.

"Colin, I *had* to tell you."

"Of course."

". . . She . . . we believed . . . you had been killed . . . as John was . . . later."

"John—*John?*" There was breaking agony in the quiet bitter question.

"Yes—John too!"

"I see."

"Colin. . . ." Edgar was restless—caged now, while Colin stood rigidly staring as though he was trying to focus something painfully and incredibly far away. "Colin—she believed that you were dead—and that there was nothing left for her but to go on—in some way. . . . She only married three weeks ago."

"Three weeks ago. . . ." Still he seemed to try and focus.

"Colin . . . you must try and understand and forgive her."

"Yes——"

"The circumstances were not of her making—and were too—strong for her. You must try and understand what it had been like for her, Colin——"

He murmured painfully: "Couldn't she remember?"

"For all her life?"

He assented dully. "I suppose not. . . ."

"You had gone—and she had to face the future."

"Yes . . . of course . . . I was dead! . . . Queer! . . . And now I've resurrected . . . most inopportunely . . . perhaps I can go back though—and stay there. . . ."

"Colin—forgive her."

"I do. . . ."

There was silence between them. . . .

Then Colin said gravely:

"So this is war. . . . One begins to understand these things rather late." He turned to Edgar. "Naturally the less you speak of my . . . miraculous resurrection to . . . to anyone the better. . . . Let the dead bury their dead . . . and so forth. . . ." He held out his hand.

"If ever I can help you, Colin . . ."

"Thank you, sir . . . Good-bye."

As Edgar descended the immaculate rubber-carpeted staircase, Colin's words, spoken without bitterness and with an awful clarity, echoed in his mind—"So this is war."

At the foot of the stairs he met Mrs. Chase.

"Well—how did you find him, Sir Edgar?"

"Very well indeed—considering."

"Shall you be coming again—to visit him?"

"I'm afraid not—I have to go back immediately to London."

She accompanied him along the corridor to the hall.

"Why, that's a pity. You might have come to visit my husband and me. A cousin of my husband's was lunching with us only a short time ago—from England. He was here on his honeymoon——"

Edgar checked an exclamation.

". . . A Major Barrett-Saunderson and his *very* good-looking wife. I wonder . . ." she added indifferently, turning away to take a note from one of the sisters, "if you know him?" Her listless tones trailed off as she perused her note.

Edgar thought, "If she were to go and talk to Colin about the coincidence . . . my newly-married daughter . . . her husband's cousin . . . an unconscious fortuitous torture. . . ."

"Mrs. Chase—I must thank you so very much for granting a special privilege."

She looked up from her note.

"Why, not at all, Sir Edgar—good-bye!"

IX

Edgar on his return from Paris remained for a few days in London to make final arrangements for the sale of Pelham, for the buyer was ostentatious in talk and niggardly on principle, a combination of qualities which lengthened any negotiations in which he took part. Edgar found a letter from Zina at the flat, an affectionate, inconsequent document reproaching him for not having "told her" . . . He read the letter twice and put it away: the gesture was weary; there seemed almost too much to be "put away" just now.

He returned to Pelham on the Friday evening. The journey from Paddington to the small, dimly-lit, dripping little station, scarcely an hour away, had a significance which he could only explain by his own "sentimentality"; the significance of something not so much loved as familiar —the loss of which would be absurdly painful. The porter, in a gleaming oilskin coat, nodded his usual "evenin', Sir Edgar"; two cars waited outside the station in the darkness, their headlights streaming steady and golden through the rain; beyond the cars a dogcart whose driver was having trouble with the restive horse ("Now then—stand, will yer—*stand!*" in gruff imprecation), and some other carts and some cyclists. The purring of the cars, the crunching steps of the silhouettes, the splashing and stagger of the horse's hoofs, the hoarse-pitched voices, had the dramatic value of a scene fragmentary and obscure and unexplained. Edgar climbed into his car and as he settled down peered out through the blurred window panes. And the small station with its dim lantern above the entrance steps, the car and carts and usual sycophants of the railway were strange and fleeting, already "half dead"! Then leaning back he reflected, as the car sped along the village street—past the rows of secretive cottages, past the village hall, the doctor's house with its red lamp, the brilliance of the public-house entrance—that these things, this scene, people, place, were "half-dead" only for him. Across the park, between the clotted darkness of the trees, he could see three lighted windows, on the top floor. (Nanny never drew down the blinds till supper time!) Those tiny oblongs of light far away across the park hurt him as something beautiful. He could feel the gentle, steady rise of ground toward the house. He shut his eyes and knew by a bend of the drive and a gradual slowing down. . . . He stepped out stiffly (he was getting rheumatic this winter).

In the hall there was warmth and quiet light and the familiar smell of pot-pourri and old much-polished furniture and burning logs.

The parlourmaid took his damp coat:

"Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson is here, Sir Edgar. She's with her ladyship in the library."

"Thank you." It seemed to him intelligent to become accustomed so soon to Zina's name.

He opened the library door—the smell of pot-pourri and burning logs was sweeter and more poignant.

"Daddy darling!"

"Hans darling!" They turned to him simultaneously and he felt them extraordinarily lovable and pitiful.

"Hans—sit down. Are you well? Will you have tea? My dear, how good to see you!"

He breathed the sweetness of their welcome: yet it had an almost exaggerated quality, as though perhaps his entrance had been a relief.

"Daddy—why didn't you come straight back here when you got back from Paris? Have a sandwich?"

"I had to do the final business, about Pelham."

Cynthia said nothing and poured out his tea; Zina watched him wistfully. "Was it beastly, Daddy?"

He shook his head: with Zina's arm round his neck the memory of last Sunday morning, at that hospital, was incredible, and scarcely to be borne: he could feel the nervous play of her finger-tips on his collar bone.

"And it's all irrevocably settled?"

He nodded. Cynthia handed him his tea.

"Where is Wendy?"

"At a party at the Branksomes. She was much excited because it's to go on until eleven, a kind of schoolboys' and schoolgirls' dance!" Cynthia scrutinised her husband's face: "Hans—there haven't been—difficulties?"

"No, my dear, it is all settled."

Zina rose. "Now—I must be getting back to my—household!"

Cynthia rose also. "You won't stay for dinner with us?"

"George expects me. Good-bye, my dears." She kissed them in turn—and as Edgar felt her cool, fragrant face against his, again he remembered that white hospital—and the slight, indifferent woman in a Red Cross uniform—and the first glad hungry look in Colin's eyes.

. . . . .

And when he was alone with Cynthia after dinner he told her; not because he had "meant to," for he had had

the feeling that he ought to keep it from her, but because, in spite of all his protectiveness and adoration, the deeper understanding between them made it impossible for him *not* to tell her.

She listened without comment, and he was aware while he spoke, that behind her silence there wasn't mere blank amazement and horror, but steady thought.

He finished brokenly: ". . . it is sheer tragedy, Cyntia, Cyntia! That now there is nothing between them but——"

She faced him, sitting with her chin in her hand.

". . . but Zina's mistake, Hans!"

He bowed his head. "You blame her too much, Cyntia—if this had not happened——"

"My dear, it was always, you *know* it, a mad, terrible mistake—and she knows too."

"It was weakness and cowardice on her part—poor darling!"

"And—just because of that weakness we cannot tell her."

She nodded. "It's enough for us—and Colin, to know. Is he, is Colin—*changed?*"

"*Now* I think that he is."

"You mean——?"

"I think that all he has seen and endured in the last four years had not made the difference that my—news. . . . He is stronger than Zina, and it will not break him, I believe, as I think its—cruelty, would break her; but he was 'changed' already when I left him: I had the feeling that I had blinded him . . . just when he had come back to the light."

"I believe there's so much in Colin, that he'll come through magnificently."

"Suppose that he should meet Zina."

Her grave confidence wavered.

"I don't know. Anyway there's no need for it——"

Edgar assented. "He will avoid her certainly. She has meant too much to him for any—compromise. Also I think that he will spare her the knowledge that he lives."

"But Hans—he must believe she doesn't care: he must imagine that she's married because she loves her husband. I don't believe, Hans, that—that if he knew that she loved him that he could *bear* not to see her again."

"But since she is married—and he is—honourable——"

"Love and war, my dear—Zina's marriage was dishonourable on her part."

"But there are always 'reparations,' Cyntia!"

"You mean Zina owes George——"

"Yes—her loyalty."

"If she can pay."

"I think she can, as long as she does not know that Colin is alive."

"But after this he may not love her. Anyway he'll go on with his own life and she won't count for him any more."

"Ideals, even when they are broken, have a significance. He will not forget her, even though she will not 'count' for him any more."

"But since she's married, Hans, he can't believe in her in the same way, because he must think she didn't care so much."

"I think that he cannot perhaps envisage her in the present, but that he will not easily escape what she *has* been for him. Just as Zina cannot altogether escape the ideals that she has deliberately broken because they made her feel alone and afraid."

Cynthia was silent for a time: then she asked:

"What's Colin going to *do?*"

"I don't know, my darling: when I had told him he did not want me any longer and I left him."

"He ought to go right away, to a different life. Otherwise, however much he may 'go on' and make himself forget, he'll always *know* that Zina's not too far off."

"He does not even know whom she has married."

"But people meet so easily; and if Zina's going to be in London half the year——"

"I think it is unlikely—and just now we cannot do anything. I think too that it is best that he should not, for his own peace of mind, have any information about her." He broke off, "Who is that arriving?"

Cynthia leant towards him and laid her hand on his forehead, giving him a sudden sense of rest.

"That's only Wendy back from her party——" and he eard Wendy's voice:

"Where are you, my dears?"

X

Zina and George took a house in London for the summer: George liked London in the months of May, June and July, and believed also that he wanted Zina to enjoy herself.

She would have liked to be near Kensington Gardens, but eventually they took the house of some friends in Cleveland Row, because it was near George's clubs. It was also, as he pointed out to her, not far from her parents' flat in Westminster, or from the Army and Navy Stores where he liked her to do her shopping; Zina had seen his point and added, of her own accord, that they were "just exactly half-way really between Buckingham Palace and the National Gallery, and on a clear day anyone on their roof could see the Nelson Column!"—a statement to which George had agreed with a determined absent-mindedness. He believed flippancy to be one of those feminine prerogatives one had best ignore.

They settled down to a routine of entertaining and being entertained—of eating a succession of similar meals with people of similar appearance and conversation: the meals were well-cooked, the people well-bred, and the talk mildly of politics, eagerly of racing, and occasionally but restrainedly of other people's misdemeanours. They were, Zina reflected, a set of "extraordinarily nice" people: neither conspicuously wealthy nor clever, but with enough money and brains to justify their strong unspoken sense of being supremely "decent" and perhaps *the* fundamentally valuable class of the nation. The women dressed well and incuriously, used a little powder, but no lip salve, smoked in moderation, and usually had their own, and their children's shoes made for them. It was their distinction to look better in the country than in London, and for their special charm (derived from a certain freshness and "brusquerie" of appearance) to be more evident at luncheon than at dinner—when they singularly didn't soften to the subtleties of artificial light, but took its radiances with aloofness and an uncompromising poise of their bare shoulders, neither suggesting nor responding to what they scarcely troubled to recognise as glamour. The men, as Zina had expected, were very much George's "run of man"; they

looked well, smelt pleasantly of soap and talked at a safe level above platitude and below epigram: some were, with a lingering deprecation, though with perfect asurance, "in the city," while others could still despite the war, in fact as well as in tradition, be patronised by one of the "professions," be "at the bar," or "in the army" as a background to their leisure.

They hadn't, these pleasant, clean, restrained people, any intricate knowledge of the arts, any "flair" for pictures or writing or music; but the relation they had with such things, though in itself a slight and trivial lien in their lives, wasn't without influence. They patronised what they knew (without knowing *why* they knew—except that those of their "sort" did somehow "know")—to be good pictures and music and books, a patronage cursorily embracing the most accessible picture galleries of Europe, the most frequently given operas—and those books vaguely comprised in the term "classics" of English (and occasionally French) literature—a patronage extended on the advice of trustworthy friends and newspapers to certain products of modern artists and musicians and authors. But these largely conventional appreciations (inherited together with clean complexions and easy voices from generations of those who "like a good" work of art) did sometimes, working through unconscious channels of practical taste, and subtly influencing (perhaps through generations) a visual adjustment, produce in the homes of these people a felicity of colour and arrangement, a fastidiousness of quality in stuffs and flowers and furniture, whose very accidental harmony made them seem peculiarly "right" and satisfying. As Zina went from one house to another, from Knightsbridge to Portland Place, from Bloomsbury to Grosvenor Road, to eat, to talk, to dance, to play bridge, it became increasingly clear to her that this general unconscious "rightness" (which in the *human* "milieu" accumulated sometimes to mere oppressiveness) had somehow a "home-creating" quality which gave these houses a dignity of atmosphere and charm of appearance that the most eclectic conscious aim at "quiet beauty" couldn't ever achieve.

If in the human element she rebelled against the "what-

ever is, is good" implication and took occasional refuge among those whose diversity of wit, occupations and morals made them, in her view, more a "set" than a phalanx (George viewed such excursions without encouragement or protest), she admitted to herself that in matters of background "these people" did easily, and without even being conscious of it, defeat the subtleties and flamboyances of the "others"; and that by some kind of predestined rightness of taste, whatever was about them *was* good!

George, for whom these people hadn't any more peculiar quality than the shaving soap which he had used ever since he began to shave, was pleased that she shouldn't merely accept, but apparently like and be liked by his friends—and the wives, sisters and friends of his friends—and was by his nature unaware of the social possibility of people being interesting and yet not fully convivial. He himself liked and disliked, approved and disapproved, was devoted or antagonistic—but he hadn't ever paused in the crowd of his fellow creatures to regard them curiously and with no emotion deeper than interest, as "specimens." He would, had he realised such an attitude as possible, have condemned it as "affected"—as one of the poses of "intellectuals"—and have had some reason in his judgment. But he wouldn't, even in Zina's case, have reached the understanding which should involve a measure of forgiveness—that intellectualism is a (possibly unsatisfying) substitute for prejudices, setting up its own graceful, if not very robust, values and providing for those who haven't any solid ideals an elaborate artificial platform, a kind of rococo grand stand from which to watch the human race. George's steady, if narrow, vision, gave him the feeling of seeing life "whole," while Zina's restless, fleeting observations presented it to her as something fragmentary and disorganised but occasionally "interesting."

. . . . .

It was after an At Home at the Lakings, where an Italian tenor and a Belgian violinist had been engaged to check the talk at discreet intervals, that Zina was seized by a desire for a change of atmosphere.

Laking was one of George's greatest friends and

represented the constituency adjoining the East Cheshire constituency which George hoped to begin to nurse in the autumn. His wife, who was one of those spare, good-looking women who can wear pink satin and diamonds without appearing to be anything except what they so excellently and adequately are, was friendly to Zina, partly on account of their husbands, partly because it was natural to her to be on terms of friendship with all women she had no cause to disapprove.

Zina met George halfway up the staircase.

"I want to go. I think I'll go on to a small dance Marion's giving—I promised to look in if I left here in time!"

George acquiesced; Marion was Zina's cousin (the daughter of Cynthia's brother) and consequently his objection to her, as being "a bit of a bad hat" with "odd sort of friends," couldn't easily be pronounced. Zina didn't know whether she herself really liked Marion—they had always quarrelled as children—and Nanny had never encouraged an intimacy between Marion Leigh and the Renner children—but Marion did nowadays provide a change.

George dropped her at Marion's door: he kissed her before she got out of the car, and adjured her not to be too late.

"I should hate you to lose your looks," were his last words. Sometimes she thought George was rather a darling.

XI

Marion had a "studio flat" of her own on Campden Hill, and the strength of mind not to try and paint or write, but quite frankly to employ the walls of the studio as a background for herself and her collection of Rops etchings, and the floor as a basis for dances and elaborately impromptu picnics. By virtue (or as some people felt it apt to say, "by lack of virtue") of her red hair, an independent allowance, and an entire lack of reticence in her coolly spoken sentences, she had made a "cult" of herself, so that the kind of people whom she considered "rather amusing" (and whom her parents, whom she didn't often see now,

considered "rather impossible") told one another that she was "marvellous" or "astonishing" or "incredibly alluring" or "too clever for words," and collected her and let themselves be collected by her.

Zina found the studio packed with dancers, the atmosphere heavy with smoke, and vibrating with the ecstatic wailing of the saxophone. Marion's flaming head and gold dress emerged from the crush.

"Hello, Zina! I'm glad you managed to get away from your political menagerie; it *was* political, wasn't it?" She didn't wait for an answer, but indicated to Zina a young man and left her.

Zina remembered meeting him there before. They danced together, and he asked her what she thought of Epstein's "Christ," a question which she had observed was frequently asked in Marion's studio; the young man's voice annoyed her and she countered by asking him what he thought of Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyam." He looked shocked. They sat down in a corner and smoked and he tried various other stock subjects. He asked her whether she didn't think Marion "too incredible and too beautiful" and whether she thought there was really anyone who even *tried* to send their pictures to the Academy. Zina found herself replying that Marion would be better looking if she weren't quite so naked, and that in her opinion the "Royal Academy" was wonderful and so splendidly English—a spurious confession of faith which the young man swallowed as fastidious people take tapioca pudding.

Suddenly she put her hand on his arm with a grip which he decided, as a connoisseur, was not intended to be a caress:

"Who's that woman?"

"Do you mean Ada Broad, the singer, that sort of er—sofa-esque creature in red?"

"No—no, over there—rather slight in a black frock with orchids."

"Oh—you mean talking to that old man with a beard and sort of—er—Dürer wrinkles——"

"Yes!"

"*Oh!* that's Olive Stanley. Don't you know her? She's perfectly rare: she only has one lover at a time, and I'm told she's written a goodish book that's coming out

in the autumn . . . I'm told men, and women, go quite mad about her, though I don't just see it, personally. . . . I mean, *I* never feel she could attract me, except quite abstractly——!"

"I—I think I've met her before—a long time ago."

"Conceivably—quite conceivably!"

Zina continued to gaze at the woman on the other side of the room: of course it *was*—it *must* be . . . that enigmatic prettiness and the delicate, rather exotic, colouring, and the peeping one-sided smile . . . Olive . . . Now Olive turned and glanced casually at Zina, and then looked again, and then—— Zina couldn't determine from her queer expression whether she meant to ignore her or laugh at her. And then, by an inexplicable, but perfectly decisive impulse, Zina got up and went across and spoke to her.

"Aren't you Olive . . . Stanley?"

The other turned a quizzical look fully on Zina.

"Yes."

"You—know who I am, don't you?" Zina felt herself blush; she couldn't yet discern whether the other were angry or amused.

"Yes." Olive's tone broke to a sudden husky laugh: "You're Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson—*now*. Eccentric of you."

"D'you mean to . . . speak to you?—or to be who I am?"

"Both. . . ."

The old man with the "Dürer wrinkles" bowed and moved off into the crowd and Zina took his place on the divan beside Olive.

"I thought you mightn't remember me?" Zina thought how peculiarly Olive's profile suggested a pretty sphinx.

Olive's husky little laugh sounded again:

"I do—vividly. The last time we met we played tennis together. Your father played with me, very badly that day, against . . ." she broke off—then added, "You were one of the most frank, enchanting and enchanted young women I've ever known!"

"Was I? I was always—a little afraid of you, and I envied your 'forehand drive'!"

"I envied you . . . other things," she turned and surveyed Zina. "What made you come and speak to me just now?"

Zina shook her head:

"I'm not sure."

"I should have thought you'd have a prejudice against me."

"Why?"

"You can easily imagine why."

"Because of . . . our husband you mean?" Humour banished embarrassment now: it was all so incredibly strange and ridiculous!

"Exactly! Because of—'our husband'—you ought to resent me or disapprove."

"I don't though; I like you——"

"Your 'liking me though' gives me an unexpected insight, into your life. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind anything."

"Those are grim depths! . . . not to mind anything; you *ought* to, it isn't living, not to—at your age!"

"You speak as if you were on a hoary pinnacle."

"I'm thirty," the one-sided smile peeped out, "five years younger than George!"

Marion came up and handed them cigarettes and drifted away again.

Olive looked acutely at Zina:

"You ought though to despise me, and be jealous of me retrospectively if you love George."

Zina heard herself say:

"I don't."

"I see. I *did*—once."

"I didn't know."

"You mean—you wouldn't have thought so!—and then, I loved the other man terribly."

"Then he——"

"He was sent out to Egypt the third year of the war and married a girl he met in Cairo. There's something in Peele's conception of "Cupid's Curse," you know—"Those that do change old loves for new pray God they change for worse!"

"But you don't"—Zina was suddenly afraid and filled

with a sense of her own "shabbiness"—"You don't still love George?"

Olive's hand touched her wrist:

"No, my dear. I only loved him a very long time ago. Those fragrant, flaming things die so easily I suppose he never speaks of me?"

"No."

"Naturally—he wouldn't. Does he make you happy?"

"He's immensely good to me."

"And very much in love with you, I expect?"

"Yes."

Olive's glance rested on Zina's pale face and beautiful, listless brown eyes:

"Poor George!"

"I think it's quite a success." Zina persisted: she wished *all* bands wouldn't play "Swanee" so often—and so interminably.

"You poor darling."

"No," said Zina. "Only one thing I'm sure about, I'm not a darling, I'm a cad."

"To George?"

"Yes."

"But if he wanted you, Zina. . . . (I must call you Zina, the other's *too* grotesque!)"

"That wasn't why I married him. . . ."

"I suppose, knowing a little about you and . . . well, I can guess why."

They paused: they were intensely aware of liking each other, of having a pitying rather comforting, sympathy for each other—and there was the element of humour. Presently Olive enquired:

"How are your parents?"

"Quite well I think—the war's tired them both rather."

"Your mother used to disapprove of me."

"Mummie disapproves less than she used to. Daddy liked you."

"Your father always struck me as having more equanimity and gentleness and understanding than any man I ever met. He's rather 'great'——and so extraordinarily simple."

"He's a darling. They live in London now."

"I thought of going to him to publish my book, and then when I saw in the papers that you had married. . . ."

"But it doesn't matter."

"Oh, but it would have, a little."

"When will it be out?"

"In October, I think. . . . Sometimes I think I oughtn't to have written it."

"Why?"

"You'll see."

"What's it called?"

Olive threw the end of her cigarette on to the floor and extinguished it with her foot:

"Household Goddesses!"

"Published under your own name?"

Olive slowly shook her head:

"That would be too much—no, anonymously! Can I drive you anywhere? I'm going now."

Zina rose with her.

"I go to Cleveland Row."

"My flat's by the river so I can drop you there."

They sought out Marion.

"But, my dear creatures, there can be *no* reason for your going *yet*—we've only just begun!"

Marion's frigid intonation was an interesting contrast to her, by this time, curiously Bacchanalian appearance.

Zina excused herself:

"My husband——"

The excuse seemed to appeal to Marion and her partner—whose hand appeared to be the only means of keeping her dress above her waist—as marvellously comic.

"Your husband . . . " they turned to Olive with a kind of relief; "but you haven't——"

But Olive merely smiled, expressed thanks for an amusing evening, and followed Zina to the door.

Olive dropped Zina at Cleveland Row:

"So near George's clubs!" she remarked. "Shall you come and see me or d'you feel it's outrageous and disloyal?"

Zina was fumbling in her bag for her latchkey.

"No, I don't. I shall ring you up and come sometimes if you'd really like it?"

Zina's tone was a little wistful: she was conscious of wanting someone sometimes quite desperately and helplessly, to be friends with.

"I would like it very much."

Zina stood and watched the red light of the two-seater recede down Pall Mall: then she shivered and entered the house. There was a tray on the table in the narrow hall, with a jug of water and glasses and some sandwiches, and a note in George's round precise writing:

Darling, I have been given orders that you are not to be called to-morrow morning as you are so late and must sleep. Yours, G.B.S.

Sometimes his "niceness" seemed to her "the worst of it."

XII

In July Edgar received a letter from Colin bearing the Paris postmark.

Don't please believe me to be as ungrateful and insensible of your kindness to me as I must seem. That day last January when you came to see me here I think I must have behaved abominably and my only excuse is that the news you brought me made me temporarily insane. I remember clearly asking you to go: but I believe you'll forgive me. Since then I have been more or less ill and useless (it is curious *how* ill a complete lack of desire for life can make one), but now I hope to relieve this place of my presence in a week's time. Everyone has been astonishingly kind and tolerant, for it must be ungrateful work to nurse a would-be corpse.

This digression about health is only an attempt to strengthen my excuse for the way I've behaved to you. I've thought of you so often since then, and of how contemptible and ill-mannered I must have seemed that day: it must have been quite as horrible for you as for me, probably more so, and I can only apologise and believe that you understood. I have wanted to write to you many times but haven't been able to, or allowed to when I felt

strong enough. I have had enough "complete rest and nourishing diet" in the last six months to reclaim all the nervous invalids in Europe. Just lately I've been allowed visitors: Mrs. Chase, an American who owns this hospital, has been amazingly kind and good to me and once or twice has brought her nice-looking and cheerful husband to entertain me. I find he is a cousin of that stiff-necked Barrett-Saunderson who used to live near Pelham. He seems a link with a past which I can't, and don't really want, to envisage as "real" any more. She reminds me of Oliver Wendell Holmes' description of the American "millionocracy" who "have a provokingly easy way of dressing, walking, talking and nodding to people": but she is essentially kind and sympathetic. Perhaps you saw her when you came. I don't know, because your visit is never referred to, as it is supposed to have been the cause of my "relapse." People are so transparently dishonest with invalids and children.

This letter hasn't any importance except, I hope, to convey to you how much I want you to "allow for" the way I've behaved. As for other things, or the question of dealing with the future, I am still curiously light-headed and feel unreal, quite incapable of hard thought or co-ordinated feeling. If I try and face things out, as they *are* after the news you brought me, I still feel unsteady and sick and helpless: but much of this must be physical.

Next week I am going back to England and going right away by myself into the country. The doctors won't let me do any work for another six months: also I must think. A blind, muttering progress won't take one anywhere.

This town dins with the "Great" Peace: all the nations of the earth assembled in one supreme attempt to worship God and Mammon!

May I write to you occasionally? You know (I hope this doesn't sound impertinent) we used to see and feel much in common! On the subject of Zina I ask you not to write to me; this must sound hysterical, but certain things are more endurable in silence, anyway at present. . . .

Edgar heard a bell ring and crumpled the letter into his pocket. Zina had rung up and left a message to say she

would call and drive him out to Ranelagh for tea. He heard her voice asking Nanny (who never permitted the daily maid who came in to help the cook, to answer the door) whether he were in.

"Yes, my lamb—he's in there."

"Hello, Daddy!"

"Zina, mein kind!"

"You'd *like* to come, wouldn't you, Daddy? George has gone down earlier to watch the polo. I asked Mummie, but she said she was going down for the week-end to Leckenham to be with Wendy."

"Yes, she went about half an hour ago."

Zina sank down on a chair. "Oh, it is hot to-day. . . ." She glanced round. "I can't a bit get used to seeing the Pelham armchairs transplanted in here! Daddy, go and get your hat."

"Very well." He departed obediently. "And your fly-whisk, darling," she called after him.

When he returned he found her quiet, curiously absent. Suddenly he wondered what she would say—*do*—if he were to show her the letter in his pocket! Would she look on it as—a death warrant or a reprieve? Could she endure such knowledge? He had a terrible, incessant sense of cheating her, though he knew there wasn't anything else he could do for her but to cheat her.

She looked up at him. "Ready?"

"Is anything the matter, Zina?"

"N—no—nothing really."

"What, my child?"

"Apparently I'm going to have a baby and I don't think I want it very much."

He realised her indifference wasn't affected.

She got up and took her gloves and bag off the sofa. "Poor little devil—imagine taking all the trouble to get born!" She faced him, and swiftly her voice changed and was pitiful. "Daddy, d'you think it's very dreadful not to be going to love one's baby?"

"But you may—all the same, Zina."

She shook her head. "I don't think I even *want* to——"

IV

THE HERITAGE

"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. . . . And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

James: Epistle.

PART FOUR

I

WENDY TO SIR EDGAR RENNER:

RUSHAM HOUSE, LECKENHAM.

July 2.

DADDY DARLING,

It is all very well for you to say that my letters home are scrappy, but you might remember that life here isn't a rest cure, especially this term, when there is tennis *and* the swimming bath *and* exams. Still I am sorry and this is a proper letter to make up for my bad past.

I absolutely *loved* "Diana of the Crossways"; *do* send me more Meredith. She must have been such an attractive, clever person; I'm rather sorry she marries that smug Mr. Redworth at the end, because even if Percy Dacier *was* rather tiresome, he would have given her a life much better suited to her nature. Don't you think so? Could you please send "Anna Karenina?" A most silly thing has happened. My literature mistress (who is *frightfully* clever and amusing) lent me "Anna Karenina" to read, and I brought it back to the house, where Mrs. Jolie found me reading it and was *furious* and said she wouldn't have such books about the house and confiscated it when I'd only read half. I told her whose it was and she sent it back to College by one of the under house-mistresses, but I mean to finish it if I have to read it by moonlight by the dormitory window!

I had a letter from Zina about two days ago saying she and George are going up to Leicestershire to stay with the Die-Hards. May she enjoy it! ! ! If you are writing to her say I'll answer her letter when I am less rushed. There has been a good deal of excitement here and solemn talk about the Peace Treaty and there is a Prize Essay I am going in for on "The Ideals and Practice of a League of Nations." I am frightfully "pro-League," as any thinking

person must be, and get infuriated by the amount of girls who just say "O nothing can stop war," because of course if enough people go on saying that obviously nothing can! ! ! Three girls who think like that share my dormitory, so, just to annoy them, I have put up a photograph of President Wilson on my dressing-table (though he *has* got a face like a tennis-shoe!) and I have taken to reciting the "Fourteen points" out loud when they are saying their prayers. Really, it seems to me fatuous to be Christian *and* pro-war! But I suppose it is all in the tradition of "Muscular Curates."

I hear from Mum that being in London is a success. Of course it's sad that we shan't be at Pelham for the summer holidays, but Zina says I can come to Croxtons for as long as I like, and Mummie said something about our going to Stratford for the Shakespeare Festival in August, which I should *love!* I wonder how the Profiteers are getting on at Pelham!

Now, my dear, I have truly inscribed a document and must stop. Heaps of love to you and Mummie.

Ever yours,
WENDY.

PS.—The Bishop who came to preach to the whole College a little time ago was *exactly* like the pictures of "Mister Zonk" that you used to draw for me when I was little.

II

ALFRED TO SIR EDGAR RENNER:

WAHRINGERSTRASSE VI, WIEN.
July 15, 1919.

LIEBER EDGAR,

I cannot say to you how glad I am at the idea of your proposal to come here to see me in September. Not only am I so glad to think that we will meet again after so many years, but also I am glad that our meeting will be soon, for when one is old it is a pity ever to delay, and I am no longer so strong as I have been and am suffering also from the privations of the last years, although now your regular parcels are making a difference to the condition of my health.

Our situation is not better than it was in the winter, perhaps even it is worse. Myself, I have no hopes unless we are soon given financial help from outside.

Meanwhile I look forward to your coming, my dear brother, and I will even say that that is what I now live for. Write to me what date you will come.

Always your affectionate brother,

ALFRED.

III

ZINA BARRETT-SAUNDERSON TO SIR EDGAR RENNER:

DYTTON COTTAGE, LEICESTERSHIRE.

Monday Evening.

DARLING FATHER,

I've wanted to write to you since that afternoon we went to Ranelagh nearly three weeks ago, when I feel that I was rather a little beast, and "distrait" and disagreeable—only I don't suppose I need explain why—to you.

It isn't an unpleasant existence here, and a relief after London, where I was beginning to feel that I should go mad if I had to face another week of those crowded hours of inglorious life. George's people are charming in many ways to be with up here, and perfectly sweet to me especially, which they don't attempt to hide, on account of the fact that I am going to oblige them with a grandson. (They are so certain it is going to be a grand*son* that old Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson always refers to it in the future as "he"—and apparently George and his father have already been deciding on which school). I feel I'm regarded now as a kind of sacred machine which has to be tended and garaged with immense care, and never jarred. Dear Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson is always urging me in her pathetic, frightened way to "take more cream"—and the old Papa escorts me for a quantity of gentle exercise in the gardens and park, and George is perpetually putting cushions at my back and providing me with foot-stools. I can't help feeling all this régime and precaution is a little premature, as I feel very well and normal, and the prodigy of male mediocrity which they expect can't possibly arrive before next February. Poor little devil.

Daddy dearest, I suppose this must all sound rather flippant, but it is a trying situation to be treated all the time as something between an imbecile and a Madonna.

Also it strikes me as so odd that people like the Barrett-Saundersons, who state the fact so lightly that in the war such millions and millions of human lives have been thrown away, and who go on rather glorifying war under the disguise of being British and patriotic, should make all this fuss about one life more or less coming into the world.

George is *really* very sweet to me, and indulges all my caprices in the most religious manner. To-morrow a garden party is being given here in my honour—so to-day I am being made to rest. Old Mrs. B.S. and I do a little mild gardening together and discuss such pleasant uncontroversial topics as the management of roses and the best places to get bulbs. Poor darling, she never *does* say anything controversial except in echo of her husband, because he expects to hear her little hesitating tones backing him up. At least, George just assumes my silence to mean acquiescence and, as you know, I never was a very garrulous young woman.

Please read whatever parts of this letter you like to Mummie, and give her my love, and please do both of you come to Croxtons any time after the twentieth, I do so want some intelligent company. I wish I could have Olive down too, but I suppose that would be what Wendy calls "a bit much." By the way, I am *not* going to say anything to Mummie about my friendship with Olive, as she would think much more than you do, that it is rather odd of me to have anything to do with her; and I suppose it *is*.

Tell me something to read. I have been browsing this morning about Byron's early letters. What a fat, manner-less boy he was! But then one pities him his mamma. The novels which arrive here are all out of what's enigmatically referred to as "the circulating library" (which always makes me think of waltzing mice or performing seals). Mrs. B.S. likes "pretty" books and my excellent father-in-law likes what he calls "a good rattling detective story" (so does George if he reads novels at all, but the papers seem to be enough for him) and between these tastes I am rather dissatisfied.

Write to me, dearest, when you have time.

Always your,
ZINA.

IV

COLIN RUSSELL TO SIR EDGAR RENNER:

SHERE COTTAGE, FALKHAM, NORFOLK.

August 9, 1919.

It was good of you to write me that letter which I found at my solicitors on my way through London from Paris. I went along to your office to try and see you that day, but was told that you hadn't been in. I meant to call again, but found, as you can imagine, a quantity of business I had to transact with regard to my money affairs. Resurrection is a complicated gymnastic. My dear old guardian's extraordinary caution, added to a kind of mystic faith in my survival, which apparently was given to no one else, make him, thank goodness, refrain from dispersing what I have in the way of capital to distant cousins, since he said there was no proof of my demise. As a matter of fact I once made a will leaving everything to Zina on condition she didn't marry anyone *you* didn't like; but it was lost when all my papers were taken from me in France.

I wish that I could have seen you. I felt peculiarly in need of a human being the day I came back to London. In the hospital circumstances were just a part of illness and convalescence, and therefore more bearable. But it made one rather shaky and strange to see Dover again, and English country, and London, after the particular kind of four years that make the interval, and to realise that the sameness and familiarity are only superficial for one, and that what has happened isn't just a "hospital pain" and possible to dismiss as one dismisses the routine of tedious convalescence.

Your letter so amazingly anticipated what I should feel returning, as you say, "to places which are terribly familiar, and yet to a life which must seem at first desolate and cruel and without hope or beauty."

It *was*, and is, like that. I was glad to be only forty-eight hours in London and then to escape to my guardian's cottage down here, which he has been good enough to lend me for as long as I like, as he is going off to America on business for six months. This suits the vague kind of

plan that I and the doctors had made between us. The house is alone by the sea—there isn't another house for a mile in any direction; so with pine woods at the back of me and sea in front, and an inoffensive old couple to look after me, I am singularly free to take your advice and to think things out steadily and try and "get my balance." It's a tricky business when one's nerves have gone so oddly as mine did for a time. I am perfectly all right now, of course, but restless, and find it quite agonising work to keep myself quiet for any length of time.

You ask me whether I've done any more poetry—I haven't much heart, or soul, for such things. I hadn't written anything since 1914 until the other day, when I wrote some verses and tore them up. They were ugly, broken things—and poetry should be born to strength and beauty—both of which seem very far away.

This letter says nothing. But it's a relief to write, since you don't mind.

Yours in affection and gratitude,
COLIN.

SHERE COTTAGE,
August 21, 1919.

I still write to your office address as you don't give me any other.

So you are going to Vienna next month to your brother! I had no idea that Central European conditions were quite so bad as you tell me. I hadn't really grasped that your brother was living in Vienna: I always thought somehow that he lived in South America. I hope his own condition isn't bad, though I expect now you do all you can for him. His news to you *appals* me. It's difficult when one has simply seen the "fighting side" of war to grasp what it's been doing, even in a merely physical way, to civil populations—old men and babies. There seems to be no end to the ramifications of waste and cruelty.

I shall be immensely glad to come and see you at the end of September when you come back. Quite what I am going to do next I don't know: I shall attempt, when I do begin any sort of work, to go abroad. I think it might be more possible, and frankly, I don't easily endure the

possibility of meeting Zina, and it would be horrible and upsetting for her to meet me—for it could give her no pleasure to know I am alive now, since I suppose she has gone to a new life, and though I don't believe she has utterly forgotten me, it is probably natural that she has recovered.

You know when you first told me she was married, apart from the feeling I had that the world was breaking into chaos round me, and that it was all too incredibly grotesque and unlike life at all—I was angry.

But now I see I was wrong. I couldn't realise at first *how* dead I must have seemed. (Funny!)

I understand it so clearly now—Zina wasn't much more than a child in such a lot of ways; she used to think everything was lovely and perfect and must always remain so, and she used to open her eyes and half-laugh at me if I ever stressed any other aspects and possibilities in life. And then all this happened to her, and she must have been like a lovely pitiful child unable to face all the sudden horror. It makes me sick and furious to realise how unhappy she must have been. There were times when that kind of wonderful clearness and rareness of her outlook used to frighten me. She didn't admit anything but perfection.

I see now how it must have hurt and bewildered and perhaps terribly changed her. And my feeling is now, not that I don't love her, but that I must love her enough to be glad that at least *now* she is happy—and that she found someone whom she could love and who loves and understands and values her, to make her happy again. If she weren't happy, then I think the irony would be more than one could bear, but as it is, there is only oneself, which isn't vastly important. One inclines to adopt exaggerated views about the importance of one's own happiness or *un*happiness.

You say she has a very "full life" and is at present living in the country. I don't want to know more, and even that, though it puts her strangely far away in the frame of a life I don't know, makes her existence queerly contemporary and actual. There seems to be two of her somehow; the unseen Zina who lives now, and the Zina of that last lovely

summer at Pelham, with its long river days—and tennis—and Wendy being naughty—and John. . . . I remember Zina so often in a white shimmery dress she wore at "Commen," that June—and her hair was unsteady because she'd just "put it up": and she let it down to go as—oh, some kind of quaint nymph, to the O.U.D.S. Ball—on the 28th—just when those Serajevo murders . . .

I had a letter last week from Mrs. Chase from Paris saying that the hospital was closing down and she felt extraordinarily at a loss without her work and wouldn't settle back into her dilettante peace time existence, and was looking round to find work worth doing. She really is a very competent little creature, and with all her money ought to be able to find much worthy of her efficient attentions. Nice of her to write to me—but she was interested in my case, I think, and possibly sorry for such a nomadic half-wit as I must have seemed to her.

I shall come up to London and start negotiations for work at the end of September, when I hope to see you. Truly you are good to me.

Yours,
COLIN.

V

Zina and Wendy sat in the bay window of what George designated the "morning-room" at Croxtons.

Wendy had wanted to play tennis this afternoon with the young man who inclined to be George's "secretary" ("a conceited, young-mannish young man" Zina pronounced him), and now it had begun to rain. Wendy curled up in an armchair in her tennis clothes, nursing her racquet and feeling annoyed. Zina stitched spasmodically at a piece of embroidery, then gazed out of the window at the drenched gardens, which despite all their orderly luxuriance of flower beds and shrubberies and borders, she could never find beautiful, and then stitched again.

Wendy yawned: "What are you going to do with that when it's finished?"

"Cushion, or work bag, or something, I suppose. I think it's rather pretty, don't you?"

"Yes. I suppose mummie's still resting?"

"I expect so, why?"

"Oh, I only wanted to ask her about writing for some patterns I want. *Oh*, Gawd, I wish it'd stop raining."

"It doesn't look as if it meant to. Why don't you resign yourself and put away that racquet and get a book?"

"Nothing to read."

"Oh, nonsense, Wendy. There are heaps of books."

"Nothing I want to read, then. I've read all the Stephen McKenna's and Elinor Glyn's in the house. I don't feel able to tackle anything heavier! Oh, damn the weather!" Wendy drummed impatiently on the floor with her rubber heels. "I do think when it's rained half August it might at least be nice in September." She looked at her sister: "How calm you always are, Zina, I believe you're getting smug!"

"Am I?" Zina smiled, half to herself. "Perhaps it's just as well: one has to learn calmness as one gets older."

"Idiot! Then you stagnate."

"Good new word, Wendy!"

"You might make an embroidered robe for the infant out of that, like the young Royalties of the Renaissance used to have. You ought to begin to make things for it, you know; it's the 'correct thing!'"

"Thank you for your maternal advice. I don't mean to." Zina flushed.

"Why on earth not? You haven't much else to do."

"It bores me."

"Funny you are sometimes. How many d'you mean to have?"

"How many what?"

"Babies, of course."

Zina glanced out of the window again: "What a curious question!"

"I don't see why. Most people decide these things nowadays and don't just leave it to Fate. I shall have two, but only one if I find the process too uncomfortable."

"Well, this one is quite enough for me just now. Oh, Wendy, there's a vehicle of some sort coming up the drive. Oh, my dear, it's Miss Grimmer in the pony-cart. I suppose she's come to call. I might have expected it, as she hasn't been yet since we came back."

Wendy stood up: "Ach Himmel! as daddy would say." "Blast the harridan. At least the rain might have stopped her. I suppose she feels her virginal complexion can face the elements."

Zina went up to an oval mirror on the wall: "Quick! lend me your pocket comb, Wendy! I'm frightfully untidy looking."

Wendy handed her the comb: "Horridus, as they say in the Latin. I'm rather 'horridus' too, but I like to be for Miss Grimmer. That monstrous hag to come and invade us like this."

The door was opened.

"Miss Grimmer, madam."

It seemed both to Wendy and Zina possible that Wendy's last words had been overheard. Zina, blushing herself, observed that Wendy was imperturbable.

"How do you do, Miss Grimmer. This is very nice of you."

Miss Grimmer's rigid paw was thrust first at Zina and then, with obvious reluctance, mingled with condescension, at Wendy.

"I have been meaning to call on you and 'the Major' ever since you've been back. But I've been so busy, you know."

Miss Grimmer sat down on the sofa beside Zina: "There's *so* much to do, one way and another."

"Well, I'm so very glad you should have come to-day. I hope you didn't get terribly wet?"

Miss Grimmer smoothed her hands over her brown "costume."

"Oh *no*, thank you. I had a mackintosh and a mackintosh-rug, and an umbrella! My brother always says it's so clever of me to drive the pony and hold up an umbrella at the same time." She laughed with modesty, and yet with relish, at the idea of her peculiar ability and then stopped short as she became conscious of Wendy's somewhat exaggerated echo of her mirth. She turned abruptly to Zina.

"And how are you? We hear——" she hesitated, and the glance of her beady eyes travelled over Zina's slender person. "We had heard that——"

Zina replied curtly: "Oh, about the baby, you mean!" She was aware of the note of annoyance in her voice and tried to suppress it. It really seemed impossible to escape from a kind of semi-prying, semi-mystical, and now from Miss Grimmer's manner, "semi-feudal," "atmosphere" about the matter.

There was a pained eagerness in Miss Grimmer's, "Yes, indeed"—as implying a rebuke to the matter-of-factness of Zina's phrase. "And *when*——?"

Zina, a little distrait, got up and rang the bell for tea. "*When?*" She glanced vaguely at Miss Grimmer, for she was wondering whether to have her mother's tea sent up to her, or allow her to come upon her old acquaintance unawares.

"When? Well, of course it's so impossible to tell, isn't it?"

Miss Grimmer, who despite lack of personal experience had always believed that one could "tell," visibly twitched with astonishment.

"But surely Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson——?"

Wendy interrupted demurely:

"But everything is so uncertain nowadays."

Miss Grimmer looked fussed and angry and Zina began to realise that her momentary inattention must have been unfortunate and swooped on a fresh subject:

"And how is Mr. Grimmer?"

Miss Grimmer's baffled look remained. "Quite well, thank you. We are making great plans for the harvest festival this year."

Zina, anxious to atone for whatever "faux-pas" she had so apparently made, urged, "Please let us send you some fruit and flowers for the church!"

But Miss Grimmer was not mollified. "Thank you," she said stiffly. "I hope you and the Major will come."

"We shall certainly try to. But now my husband is nursing his Cheshire constituency he so often has to be down there."

"And who is the present member?"

"A Liberal called Holmes."

"Ah, yes, I know the name. His wife entertained a great deal in London last season."

"Did she?"

The Renner family had always been astonished by Miss Grimmer's intricate and intimate knowledge of the social activities of people whom she had never met and of whom most people had scarcely heard.

Miss Grimmer's humour improved as she proceeded to display her knowledge.

"Yes indeed. She gave a big reception in June, two thousand four hundred people I think there were, and she gave a dance, quite a select little dance, for her son, who is at Harrow, during the Eton and Harrow Match." Miss Grimmer broke off: "Ah, how do you *do*, Lady Renner."

Zina thought: "Mummie's really wonderful." Cynthia's manner was welcoming and yet without any insincerity or false sweetness:

"It seems a long time since we met, Miss Grimmer."

Tea was brought in and they settled around the small table.

"Indeed, Lady Renner, we are all quite strangers." The thought apparently struck Miss Grimmer as humorous, for she laughed again while her glance took in what Cynthia was wearing, and the fact that Wendy was eating a cucumber sandwich with an untidiness of which all Nanny's discipline had been unable to cure her.

"Ah, and *here* is the Major!"

Miss Grimmer's admiration for George and the perpetual, almost protective interest she took in his affairs, led her to imagine herself, in the long intervals when she didn't see him (for they had actually met in conversation half a dozen times) as being more intimate with him than she actually was. In fact he regarded her (when he rarely, either actually or in thought, did regard her) as one of those respectable spinsters often, and rightly, found at the head of small affairs in respectable villages. That her greeting of him was always effusive struck him as perhaps a natural expression of a special sense of privilege. He approved of "the clergy" and of the relations of the clergy, in their place—which he felt was, by gracious dispensation, occasionally and encouragingly in the drawing-rooms of "the county."

"*Well*, Major!" a coyness was perceptible in the manner of the Vicar's sister.

George shook hands with her and introduced his secretary: "Mr. Brereton—Miss Grimmer," and the "young-mannish" individual began to busy himself with supplying the females about him with tea.

Miss Grimmer's glance followed George as he bent over his wife and said something to her, and she acutely wondered what Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson's "Oh well, it can't be helped" in a diffident tone was "about." Then her attention was claimed by Cynthia's questions about the village, the Women's Institute, and the new owners of Pelham.

Miss Grimmer pronounced: "Naturally it's a great change. But they are very good parishioners, very good I feel, and two of the younger girls help me with the Sunday School." Her look turned on Wendy who was, so it seemed to Miss Grimmer, "flaunting her flirtation with that young man" in the face of the assembled company. She noted too that Wendy's nails appeared "unnaturally polished." Wendy became aware of Miss Grimmer's scrutiny and leant toward young Brereton and over a plate of cakes instructed him to "look amorous," a conspiracy into which the youth only too easily and somewhat pathetically entered.

"Please," said Miss Grimmer in reply to Zina's question, "just half a cup." She turned to George, who had sat down beside her:

"Lady Renner has just been telling me that Sir Edgar has gone off to Vienna. How very, very for*giv*ing of him."

George, who had a fundamental sympathy with Miss Grimmer's implied condemnation, somewhat brusquely defended his wife's family.

"Well, after all we are at peace."

Miss Grimmer felt herself a spirited Englishwoman:

"All the same one cannot forget who began the war."

Cynthia looked coolly, yet without resentment or hostility at the speaker.

"But surely, Miss Grimmer, to persist in hostility must only encourage that state of mind among peoples which makes war possible."

"I can never forgive the Germans, Lady Renner," the

implication of Austrians was unspoken but meant and received.

Zina's pale cheeks flamed suddenly.

"But Christianity, surely——"

Wendy sat upright and remarked in clear cooing tones: "But Christianity's démodé, isn't it, Miss Grimmer? Nous autres!" She identified herself with Miss Grimmer with a little nod and smile.

Miss Grimmer would, though she wouldn't have expressed her emotion so crudely to her conscious self, have liked to bury her teeth in Wendy's white throat. But with ladylike fury she merely helped herself to another sandwich, although she already had one on her plate, and made a remark about "justice."

Cynthia remarked gently:

"But I feel justice is too easily claimed as an excuse by people who want vengeance."

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," Wendy remarked in clear vague tones. "I saw that written up in a bus the other day!" She ignored Zina's frown.

Miss Grimmer, "an Englishwoman on her mettle," said she would like to know who started the war, and her stary glance and drawn-down upper lip proclaimed that to any honest man or woman the answer was clear.

George remarked, "The Germans undoubtedly," and Miss Grimmer melted under this pale but desired ray of sympathy.

"But nobody seems to have hanged the Kaiser yet, in spite of all the promises we've been given. It's time that some of the war criminals——"

"But one rather feels that, like most criminals, his condition is pathological," Zina's temper was cool again: she was afraid from George's expression that he was beginning to be interested and would soon pronounce his views, which she was aware tended to express much of what Miss Grimmer believed. It was one of the things, "the War," over which she and George so fundamentally disagreed that he had perforce added it to the list of things about which he was "nice to her"; a list which comprised her half-Austrian ancestry, her views on social reform, her taste in pictures; these were things of which they tacitly, and on his part tactfully, didn't speak, and Zina, though she

might occasionally resent his rather superb "passing over" of these differences, felt some gratitude and respect for his reserve. It was one of the qualities in him which made her repeat to herself that he "treated her well." Sometimes pity was added to her cool gratitude and almost unwilling respect and she saw him as pathetic, as unconsciously and clumsily and arrogantly pathetic, and herself as the instrument of his wanton, unkind fate. Or she would consider herself and Olive (for her spasmodic friendship with Olive had for her vaguely the pleasure and reproaches of conspiracy!) as two sirens who had somehow combined to seduce and torment this pompous, childlike, irritating man. By such visions she could induce a romantic attitude toward him, and let her elaborately worked up pity lead her on to a sort of "affectionateness" . . . and then abruptly he would bore her so that she avoided his company with a sense of guilt and resentment.

It was apparent to her that his Parliamentary "dedication," the political ambitions which had been part of his convention ever since she had first met him, had converted his talk, which might have been the negative platitudinism of the "nice athlete" into the only too positive and oppressive garrulousness of one who feels himself born to die a Conservative.

He was telling, turning from Miss Grimmer to Cynthia, an anecdote about the Kaiser. His clipped, half-stifled tones (he seemed in his emphatic manner to have dough enmeshed in his vocal chords) presented the incident as overwhelmingly worthy of consideration.

Zina nodded to Wendy's impatient request:

"'Buck' and I want to go and play ping-pong!"

"All right, my children."

Wendy casually excused herself and departed, the young man at her heels.

The Airedale sat beside George while he talked, and blinked its eyes with pleasure when he scratched its head. The Airedale adored George.

Zina leant back in her chair. She didn't listen; it seemed to her enough that her mother should listen, with such a perfection of attention and the faintest lift of her arched eyebrows, and that Miss Grimmer should listen.

She was glad to feel so tired; it was, in its way, an occupation. She couldn't even focus the intention of fetching her embroidery from the window seat. George's talking was just going on and on, like the rain out of doors. Her glance traced the curves of the pomegranate pattern of the wallpaper—so *much* pattern. A nice whitewashed cell would be preferable. This made one's head ache, or perhaps it ached anyway. She wondered if she would mind dying. George would be better really, with a baby instead of her, and she wouldn't be involved in so much that bored and oppressed, and by a kind of infinity of perspective, terrified her. If she died George could make a little shrine in his mind about her, and bring up his son, to be George the second. Daddy would mind, and Mummie, it wouldn't be fair to them, poor dear darlings, just to die so nicely and easily. Even Wendy would mind, and be hurt. Curious how un-simple dying was, when you had to think about other people. Lucky Juliet had been in a vault in Italy. And Hero and Leander, and—but real things, real existence was unromantic, unreligious. No ultimate Paradise, or twin stars in the heavens, just millions of little tawdry candles flaring or blown out by gusts of wind, or flickering down to a greasy gutted end. "To cease upon the midnight with no pain!" Funny how one loved certain strings of words, just a kind of knack of arrangement that made them beautiful, and a little streak of sentimentality of one's own, that made them seem—appropriate. Now Miss Grimmer was going, putting on her gloves. *What* a tiresome woman, bitter and silly, and inquisitive: Mummie was sorry for her. One was really. Poor Miss Grimmer, with her drawn up little face and intricate ugly clothes. Why couldn't Miss Grimmer marry George and have the baby?

Zina rose to say good-bye; it occurred to her, a flying spark of humour, that she might expound her idea to them. Miss Grimmer's hand was in hers:

"So very nice, to see all of you again!" Cynthia was saying, so very sweetly, and perfectly that she wished to be remembered to Mr. Grimmer, and George went out to help Miss Grimmer on with her mackintosh. And Zina was

alone with her mother, and all these pomegranates flourishing and contorting over the walls.

Zina sat down again.

"Zina, you're very tired?"

"La Grimmerre, Mummie, a little exhausting."

"I know. One has to bear with her. D'you feel all right?"

"Yes, Mummie, thanks."

Cynthia bent over the armchair and kissed her daughter's forehead.

"Look after yourself, my sweet." She hesitated for a moment, and stroked her hair: then said absently:

"This appalling rain!"

Zina took her mother's hand (such a pretty hand she thought, looking down at it).

"Don't worry about me, Mummie."

Cynthia shook her head.

"No, darling." She smiled a little sadly to herself and took up her knitting bag and went out of the room.

VI

Colin sat among the sand dunes, his fingers pushing through and playing with the hot silky sand, the salt wind, which to day seemed to be hushed to a velvety texture, caressing his forehead and neck and eyelids. He watched, beyond the deserted strip of yellow smoothness the horizon of the sea and the occasional passage across that dark palpitating blueness of a white sail, or a fishing smack whose sails were tawny in the sun, or far out low phantom grey steamers, hardly perceptible, breathing tiny evanescent trails of smoke into the sky.

He lifted his arm to glance at his watch; the sand ran down his wrist under his shirt cuff. "Twenty past six." He wondered why in such an existence he bothered to keep a watch going at all, except that old Mrs. Cook liked him to be in for the meals that she bustled all day to prepare for him. He stretched out and lay on his side, leaning on one elbow. A new white sail appeared, taller and more slender than the last, an exquisite shivering thing, a white bird—a silver blossom. A flock of gulls strutted like small

fat soldiers in cream-coloured uniforms with grey facings, on the surfaces that the receding tide had left wet and pale brown.

Colin shut his eyes and was enveloped by the savour of the air, by its wide, endlessly blowing cleanness; wind that had come over fathomless tracts of bitter waters (green and fierce, or blue and glitteringly quiet) had roared or shrieked and whispered past specks of human craft with a sublime innocence of man in his ingenuous little contrivances. Clean, Colin thought, as anæsthetics are beautifully and queerly clean, so that one could, one's eyelids closing more and more heavily, sink through greenish whirling pools of imagination through nebulous clutching, receding visions deeper and deeper into a subaqueous oblivion. . . . He was conscious of the very faint ticking, whirring sound of the wind among the dry grasses of the dunes; it seemed to echo a perpetual, a petty harsh restlessness in himself which irritated the clear and fearless peace that he sought.

"What was the good," he took up a handful of sand and let it run through his fingers. . . . What was the good of this search for clearness of mind, this longing for a mental and spiritual peace, when one only grew more and more restless and less satisfied. Solitude, all these days deliberately and absolutely alone didn't quiet one, allow ideas to shift and range themselves, or give any kind of peace. More and more one only wanted to move, to work, to move about and work and work until one was tired out and could sleep, and wake again and work.

Solitude and beauty, moonlit nights when one got up, horribly, feverishly sleepless and looked out through the pine trees across banks of shadow which were the dunes to the phosphorescent sea, gleaming and whispering under the steady vault of the stars; when one could smell the scents of the pines and the hayfields and stocks and roses mingled in the salt night air; these things didn't bring peace and steadiness—only the pain of their beauty, and the gnawing pain of remembering.

And even as he thought of remembering the pain wrenched again, and he caught his breath with quick gasps,

and then smiled at himself from common-sense. Fool one was even a dramatic fool perhaps, to let one's own emotions and futile longings drive one, possibly, into a hundred exaggerated little poses of unhappiness. Possibly. . . . He grasped at a cynicism which was, he was aware, unnatural to him, hoping momentarily to find in it some kind of antidote. But one didn't, one couldn't, even if one was weak and a fool, pretend that it didn't matter, didn't hurt, as no physical privation, no horror or anxiety or simple despair even had ever hurt before, this death of hope, by coincidence really—no more—this sudden ironical imprisonment in circumstances which might, by just one trick of fate less, have been by now so magically right and beautiful.

And all one came to, through all the tangle and shadow of thought, through all this confusion of longing and bitterness, was a determination somehow to get through, to muddle out and go on. But tranquillity, belief, these things didn't come to one; only this indefinite but insistent desire to do *something* all the time; to "get on" and get something (preferably something worth while, that might be, vaguely, any "good") done in one's life. There must be work one could do not altogether futile and useless. He opened his eyes again and gazed across the shore: the light was growing mellow, turning the sands to a coppery gold; all the ships were out of sight.

The tickering of the wind in the dry grasses began to get on his nerves. Suddenly he heard a voice behind him:

"Well, Colin!"

He sat up and turned, hot and trembling from head to foot.

"God!" He stared at the small, elegant figure, pale grey and a brilliant green hat: "Mrs. Chase!"

He felt suddenly cold and unnerved: it was "queer" to him that it was only, though so silently and unexpectedly, Hope Chase.

She looked steadily up at him and said in her flat, indifferent voice:

"I just thought I'd come and see you."

VII

She made one think of a Cartier brooch silently dropped on the sand, a rare and exquisitely set jewel amazingly out of place. In Paris she had had a simplicity, but on the shores of Norfolk she appeared exotic, and almost, in the slim perfection of her clothes, "stagey," the *tout ensemble* suggested the heroine of light opera.

He held out a hand.

"This is good, to see you."

She smiled faintly at his astonishment and ignored the hand.

"The hospital's closed down now, you know"—she was looking him up and down, while she clasped her light coat against the breeze—"so I came over to England with my husband for a few days. I left him to stay with his relations. I thought I'd just motor up and see you." She took possession of the shore (bare and crude though it seemed about her) as though it had been her drawing-room. "Do please sit down. I imagine you were having a siesta."

She sublimely seated herself on the sand, and beckoned him to sit beside her: he caught a whiff of her perfume, a lingering Oriental scent that always trailed from her movements, some blend of amber and cedarwood and jasmine. It brought a sudden tang of distant beautifully complex frivolities into the clean azure air; conjured up the glinting parade of cars and taxis in the Bois, of sunshades vividly and silkenly patterned about wide streets and long sun-barred avenues; and rooms perfectly cool and rich and quiet, and food and drinks appropriately iced, and the murmur of congenial talk; a hundred unquestionable perfections of luxury. These were her atmosphere, and in this social luxuriance her unflinching seriousness and her completely unconscious insolence flowered with the exotic simplicity of an orchid. And yet she so strongly represented herself as being one with the mass of human nature (for on the question of Humanity she had deep beliefs), so sweepingly ignored the barriers which preserved her peculiar cherished rarity, that it had seemed sometimes to Colin in his talks and silences with her that she had come, in her conception of herself, to a belief in her own somehow

prophetic quality, felt herself identified with and yet mystically remote from essential humanity. And he couldn't ever determine whether this half-romantic, half-evangelical conception were derived from her wealth, or her Americanism or from the combination of these two qualities with a supremely confident femininity. There was such simplicity in her subtleties, and yet when one had analysed these subtleties and "nuances" and reserves to a set of accomplished pretences one began to be conscious of depths in her simplicities, one began to wonder whether she *did* after all pretend; whether in fact, she weren't quite perhaps extraordinarily and unreservedly, sincere.

"I see you are surprised."

"Didn't you expect me to be?"

"Yes." She didn't bother to explain what might seem an inconsistency. Her unclinking gaze noted the sea. "I enjoyed my drive up here. We stopped in Ely and saw the Cathedral."

"We?"

"Myself and my chauffeur. I took a car while I'm in London."

"Did he appreciate the architecture?"

It was still incredibly odd to Colin that she should be seated beside him here on the shore.

"Why yes. I think he was interested."

"And you?" She hadn't really, he reflected, *got* a profile. And yet there was a distinction about the small, indefinite features, thoughtfulness in the brow, and a certain inflexibility of the lightly boned jaw. She turned her look full on him.

"I am always deeply moved by great architecture," she said: her look probed his with a curious unembarrassed intensity. She added after a pause: "Are you glad to be right away from your past in the hospital?"

"I suppose so. It had it's kind of peace though."

"But hasn't this a greater peace?" She indicated the sun-flooded seascape, the mellowed sky. Colin's look followed the liquid glitter of her rings:

"It makes me desperately restless." He hadn't wanted to talk about himself to admit anything and yet she was sympathetic, seemed swiftly to understand.

"The hospital was better?" Still her look was on him, urgently, and for a second he fancied almost pathetically, though one didn't, despite all her slightness and nervously worn attractiveness, associate "pathos" with her.

"Yes, it was white and ordered—and certain. One didn't have to screw oneself up to live."

"I see." Curious, he thought, that there were tears in her eyes: what quick, unaccountable reactions some women had! She continued in her vague, listless way:

"I came here, partly, to see if I could help you."

He wondered what obscure prompting of honesty had made her interpolate "partly." He was moved:

"That was terribly good of you." It began to dawn on him as rather wonderfully part of her grand manner to let her sympathies sweep her, without any sense of possible exaggeration, over miles of unknown road.

"I'm awfully grateful."

His phrase prompted her to a strange wistful smile he couldn't understand.

"I wish that I could help you to get really, entirely well. Your answer to my letter made me think"—her voice altered a semi-tone nearer conventionality—"that my patient wasn't perhaps getting on as he ought!"

"I suppose all nerve cases are slow in growing back to beef!" He wanted to get behind what she meant, and just why she'd come. Caprice? Real disinterest? An unaccountable beautiful friendliness? She had been good, specially good to him in Paris toward the end; he remembered that she had been extraordinarily "sweet," exceptionally "on the spot" when they'd said good-bye. She had driven him to the Gare du Nord in her car, and he had tried so hard not to seem preoccupied by what he was going away to, by his going to London, England, bits of the other life again. And she had said, "I'll write to you, Colin," and walked away, and she had written rather intricate, admonishing letters on sheets of grey crested paper. She had called it her "after care" course, in her last note.

"The sunset's going to be beautiful, there's a kind of pinkish light beginning already."

"Pinkish" jarred him: he had always hated the word pink to describe anything but prim cottage flowers, or children's cheeks, or housemaids' dresses. Sunsets weren't, when you felt their whispering ethereal glow, their vast flooding light, as though the petals of millions of roses were turned to perfume and breathed in a strange still music over the heavens, sunsets weren't "pink." "Pink" was buttoned up and starched and impudent. Even "rosy" was too familiar, too suggestive of health and eiderdowns; there wasn't a word really. He wondered if she meant to stay for the sunset. Ely Cathedral, and a sunset, and a moonlight drive back: and then he checked himself for being silly, unkind, and remembered that she had been understanding and amazingly good to him. His remorse for a fleeting, foolish annoyance made him ask her whether she couldn't stay and have supper with him at his cottage. She nodded:

"I was hoping you'd be able to put me up. There doesn't seem to be any kind of hotel around here and I don't mean to go back to London. My chauffeur can sleep in the kitchen."

It was impossible, by her cool tone and impassive glance, to be taken aback, but Colin permitted himself to be, for a few moments, quite vulgarly "intrigued!" Just why? to stay alone with him in a remote cottage, to motor down with an avowed intention of staying. But one *didn't*. He glanced at her, her chin was cupped in her hand and she was gazing into the distance. She couldn't anyway, however enigmatic she had increasingly become for him, expect . . . with all their rare, almost forcedly soul to soul preliminaries—the rather exaggeratedly ethereal plane of their intercourse. . . .

Her kitten eyes met his look, and he couldn't guess if she even remotely wondered whether he were disconcerted or surprised. She shivered:

"It's cool suddenly. I think we'll go back and I'll have my things unpacked and change."

He had a vision of old Mrs. Cook's astonishment at her and her "things!" They walked back together across the dunes toward the low-roofed house half hidden among the pines. They walked in the deep dry sand like people

wading. Her motor stood in the yard by the stables where the pony cart and the stout cob and some gardening tools and ladders and buckets were kept.

"Your car looks like an international financier strayed on to a rustic ale-bench!"

She smiled her wide, oddly unbecoming smile. "It does rather." Her small face grew serious again. "I see my suit-case has been taken indoors."

Colin "handed her over" to Mrs. Cook who looked her up and down with doubt, and then accepted her with the deference she might have given had she been so privileged to the Queen herself. (Mrs. Cook had never seen the Queen, though Cook had seen her when he went to London shortly before their marriage.)

Hope said without emphasis, "I think your cottage is a perfect retreat. I'll meet you at supper," and followed Mrs. Cook's difficult footsteps up the narrow stairs.

. . . . .

Mrs. Cook gave them sausages and baked apples for their supper. Colin apologised:

"I'm afraid one eats queerly here." But he didn't really suppose that Mrs. Chase noticed much what she ate and anyway she ate so little.

They faced each other over the blue-checked tablecloth, while out of doors the afterglow died to dusk, and they talked vaguely and spasmodically of Paris, of the aftermath of the Peace Conference, of books, and country life in France, and in America and England. She avoided the topic of his health and future, but asked him generally about his writing. Hadn't all his experience given him something to write about, to express?

"Filth and horror and futility, and more filth and more horror and *more* futility?" He could see her recoil; idealism incarnate, in a black dress, recoiling.

"But is that *all*, absolutely all?"

"Almost."

"I so hate to hear you say it."

"But *you* must have seen the backwash of it all in hospital——?"

Her eyes were luminous and reproachful in the dusk, fixed almost imploringly on him across the table.

"But there *was* another side, courage, patience, wonderful endurance and sacrifice."

"And for *what?* For what *use?*"

"Surely these moral qualities are very great and very wonderful and must lead to a better, cleaner world. You only allow yourself to see the 'dogs of war,' but afterwards——"

"And you," he wondered whether she'd resent the flippancy, "prefer to consider the dogs of war as the 'Hounds of Spring!' They are good, these actual qualities, stupendous, I admit. But their exhibition isn't worth the price. Contemporary generations are too busy paying to profit by it, and future generations will forget, ignore it, ugliness and moral beauty together."

Mrs. Cook's broad gnarled figure appeared in the doorway carrying a lamp and a tray with two large cups of coffee. She set the lamp on the sideboard.

"Thought you'd be likin' coffee this evening, sir!"

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Cook!" He was relieved to see that her creased countenance was benign: he couldn't conjecture exactly what Mrs. Cook must think, but obviously she thought well. And these slow, staring peasants were shrewd, had a kind of instinctive touchstone, better in many ways than judgment, which was so often over elaborated, self-conscious.

Mrs. Cook went out and clicked the latch of the door: she left a pleasant aroma of cows and cloves and rough linen and yellow soap.

"What a very dear old woman."

"I hope she looked after you nicely!"

"Yes indeed. She talked to me quite a lot when I encouraged her." Hope took her cup of coffee off the tray.

Colin laughed mildly: "Monster cups!"

She looked at him, gently indulgent to his amusement, perhaps, he conjectured, professionally pleased that he should laugh; and he felt abruptly, rather sickeningly unhappy.

"I think it's so much more right and rational to have cups this size. All our degenerate conventions——"

He reflected that her cup was almost as big as her face, and then he observed, without any emotional comment, that she was having one of her phases of looking beautiful and spiritual and piquant. Her ashen-gold hair, drawn severely apart over her wide brow, shone in the lamplight with a pale phosphorescence, and the contours of her cheek and mouth and chin were mysteriously etched. In sepia shadows thrown by the light of the lamp: the pearls coiled at the base of her narrow throat seemed to throttle a being less real, more evanescent and less securely beautiful than themselves; her head and throat, phosphorescence of hair and curves of shadow, might fade sudden into the background of brown dark shade and leave the pearls coiling and gleaming in mid-air.

She said, lighting a cigarette:

"I've got to do something, find some work to do. There's so much to be done in which I could be very valuable. I wasn't born to be idle."

Colin nodded.

She continued: "Besides, I'd die of nerves and discontent with my useless self if I sat still. When one has ability and gifts——"

"D'you still want to nurse?"

"Not necessarily. Some kind of work that's going to relieve pain and suffering though, or help my fellow beings. I had thought of trying to get to Russia."

"Why don't you?" Colin hesitated. It was strange the way this woman linked herself up with him, came to see him, asked his advice, but he classed it, this strangeness (he had thought it over while he, in deference to her, changed into a suit for supper) among the whims of legendary princesses, the caprices of rich women, and vagaries of purely romantically-minded Americans. "Why don't you go to Austria? I'm told by a very old friend of mine who has a brother living in Vienna that conditions there are appalling! Starvation, misery, an awful need for help. I had a letter from him yesterday, he's out there himself for a visit just now; apparently there are various organisations, the Red Cross, the American Relief Administration, the Friends, working out there since the early summer; but they need more workers and help I've no doubt."

She responded, a substratum of eagerness in her indifferent manner:

"That might be possible. It sounds very much what I'd *like* to do. I had better go right back to the headquarters of these various organisations in London to-morrow and find out just exactly how I'm to set about it. I shall cancel my visits in this country and go out there right away."

Colin admired the unhesitating swift decision, made vaguely in the course of a sentence between one syllable and the next, and her superb passing over of any trivial possibilities of delay or obstruction. So must a spoilt youngest daughter of the gods, with a craze for philanthropy, have spoken, expecting and being given a little cosmos, some interesting planet, to be "good to."

"You move quickly!"

"Where's the use of delay?"

"You mightn't like it?"

"But if I feel myself called to go there!"

Again the prophetic touch—grand and absurd—"called!"

"At this rate you'll be there in a week."

"I certainly hope so." He look changed somehow: "And you?"

"I shall be here still."

"Have you no ambition! No desire to work again?"

"Ye . . . es. I think I have. Sooner or later."

"The English all procrastinate! And when they rouse themselves they find they have one foot already in the grave!"

"Deep down," he said lightly, "I believe you have the soul of a hustler, Mrs. Chase!"

"When will you call me Hope?" she demanded with a vague imperiousness.

"I bow to your permission."

He could feel her beginning to chafe at their lightness.

She reverted: "You must begin work soon. You should write—prose, if you don't feel in a state of spirit for poetry!"

"One's so torn between the imperative need for getting something done—and the laughable futility of doing anything."

"That's very wrong"—she was lighting her third cigarette since their meal; the flare of the match gave, momentarily, a frantical gleam to her eyes. "I am of the opinion that work is always worth doing . . . the salvation of one's soul. I should find it impossible only to live for myself. Also it makes one's life so much more interesting——" She didn't say "intrsting" in the English way, but thoughtfully, syllable by syllable, "inter-esting."

"I know." She was, of course, saying the obvious, saying too, in a way, what one didn't say so glibly about souls and selves, but the husky, self-possessed tone made them seem not only "not banal," but almost significant. "You begin," he added, wondering if he at all meant it, "to inspire one."

She didn't answer: just looked at him. She had this way, he realised, of not, of never, he admitted in reflection, "playing up." She was, one began to feel, almost strangely and terrifyingly sincere.

"Are you pleased," she asked after a pause, "that I came?" There was a constraint in her voice, it was queer for her even to admit a possibility of anyone not being pleased, gratified by her presence.

Colin said eagerly, for there seemed to him now something wistful, sad, about her; he had a sense that she was somehow threatened in her immense unconscious pride.

"Hope, you know I must be! . . . The sudden visit of an enchanted princess!" That was, in a way, how it did now seem to him, her odd coming upon him like this.

"You looked disappointed when you saw me. I thought, perhaps, you expected someone else!"

"Someone else?" Had he? But he hadn't expected anyone! And anyway how could she have possibly discerned that just for one mad uncanny second he'd hoped.

"I did *expect* anyone! I was astounded and delighted."

"I'm glad," she stated. She dropped the glowing stub of her cigarette into the dregs of her coffee. Colin heard it sizzle out.

"You must come and visit me in Austria. I'll be there for a time, I suppose. It'll be interesting for you."

Amazing, imperious notions she had! Visit her!

"I think I'm actually more likely to get some kind of journalistic or business job, possibly in America or South Africa. I want to be well away from England."

"Don't you love your country though? and want to stay here after all your time away?"

Colin shrugged his shoulders.

"One can love and still want to be away."

"Only if you're afraid to love." She illumined him unexpectedly: "I think that I despise every kind of fear, and especially fear of feeling and emotion."

"Fear is sometimes safety."

"Is it?" She had lost the thread now, and was plunged in a new submerging conviction. "Is it?" she repeated mechanically, and they were lost again in one of her silences.

She rose and walked, her unpurposeful, ungraceful walk, to the window, and between the lamplight and moonlight she seemed unreal.

"What a wonderful fragrant night!" She was leaning out now. Colin joined her and looked out.

"It is good."

"It makes me feel so strangely uplifted and humble."

Again he wished she wouldn't *say* these things, quite like that. Of course it was true, but—one wouldn't speak of the beauty of night glibly and earnestly like that. This beauty that clutched and pained one to silence. . . .

"Now I'm going to bed. Good night." She turned to face him, and, somehow because he felt it appropriate, because he felt again that swift, inexplicable pity for her, and because he had a sense that she would expect it, he bent and kissed her (again that Oriental scent of jasmine and cedarwood).

"Good night . . . Hope!"

When she had gone he mused, now without any more wonder at her coming and going. She just was, he decided, like that. And gradually his thoughts ceased to circle round her, and flew beautifully and painfully, like maimed birds, to what he couldn't ever quite obscure in oblivion—the might-have-been which haunted his vision—a gutted

crystal castle—a jagged loveliness, opalescent and utterly deserted . . . Zina.

Up above him he heard Hope Chase open her windows to the night.

VIII

"Is Sir Edgar in?"

The girl who had emerged into the corridor competently appraised him.

"Mr. Russell?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell him you're here. . . . Will you wait in here, please?"

He followed Wylie's trim-skirted, bob-haired successor (Wylie was not at St. Dunstan's) into the outer office. She disappeared through the door with the panel of frosted glass marked PRIVATE; re-emerged:

"Will you go in, please?" She smiled, a little provocatively but reservedly as he passed her: good-looking young men, even if one was independent, getting four pounds a week——

Edgar at his big desk, rose and stretched out both hands.

"Colin, I am so glad, so glad——"

"So am I, sir."

They sat down to face each other across the desk; the same chairs, the same desk as five years before, when John had come in too. Each knew that the other remembered.

"I got your note at my club, but I was coming, anyway, to see you, as soon as you were back."

Colin saw, as he hadn't seen in Paris, when they'd last been face to face, how Edgar had grown older. His moustache was almost white, his square cheek and jaw bones were more rigid under the brownish finely-wrinkled skin, the furrows deeper across the wide brow; his look was somehow more deeply whimsical—as though more than ever his sense of truth pleaded for humour.

He repeated: "I am so glad to see you . . . you are better?" He leant forward and Colin could feel searching sympathy dissolve the defences of "manner." "You are more rested now?"

"I think so. But I don't want rest."

"So I imagine." Edgar could apprehend Colin's unrest in the air, as something electrical and painful; and observed his steady, but at moments, curiously scared look, and the nervous clutching of his fingers on gloves and walking stick.

"That is my chief reason for sending to you immediately, because I think that I have found something for you to do." He spoke intentionally in level, practical speech, and felt Colin's atmosphere grow quieter.

"How amazingly good of you!"

Edgar checked the thanks with a momentary gentle smile. "Whatever I can do for you I wish from my heart to do." A spectre drifted between them, and faded again in the practicalities of the present. "It has been my visit to Vienna which has given me the idea."

"The idea?"

"When I returned two days ago I went to see my old friend Lessor, of the *Daily Report*, and asked him if he had, on his paper, a correspondent in Vienna, where I had found such terrible and such significant conditions. He told me, what I had supposed, that they had there no regular correspondent. As it is the policy of his paper to be very much concerned with international affairs from a constructive point of view, I emphasised the need of his having a representative in Vienna, which seems to me an epitome of all that war can do to a civil and gentle population. He not only agreed with me and was deeply concerned with what I told him of all the misery and distress that I had witnessed, but he accepted also my suggestion to send you out there as his correspondent. That is, of course, if you wish it, and I had gathered from your letters . . ."

"Indeed I do: it'd be the most astoundingly interesting job: I'd love it. D'you really think Lessor would?"

"I told him you would go and see him, if you wished to go, and arrange matters to-morrow morning. I gave him my assurance that you have talent and ability."

"You hardly know if . . ."

"I believe I can judge."

"How long will he send me for? Not that I mind how long it is."

"A year perhaps—possibly more. That you must arrange with him. He will pay you quite well, I think."

"Also a consideration. I used to think I wasn't a too badly off young man, but now everything's so expensive."

"You won't find your life expensive in Vienna, anyway. For the foreigner . . ."

"How is your brother?"

Edgar shook his head. "It was a shock to me to see him, even though I was prepared to find him changed. I had known him as a prosperous, popular banker in a flourishing middle age, and he has become an old sick man, and all my friends, all the families I knew as a boy, and visited again later, are dead or in, perhaps, a worse condition; in terrible penury, without the least necessaries of life, and without hope. Most of the great families and distinguished people do not see you at all now, for if they are alive they are far too proud to display their poverty, and if they go out their poverty shows itself in their pinched looks and patched, worn clothing. Many of them, who will not humble themselves as the Baronin, my brother's landlady, has done, to work (or as the professional classes, where the men will do washing and carpentry, or whatever they can find), just sit all day in their beautiful old chateaux or apartments, and sell their beautiful furniture and pictures and heirlooms to the dealers who crowd to Vienna to buy in such an opportune coincidence. Then they have a little money to go on with; but each week the money has less value, buys them less—and they have to go on selling their possessions. And then, it happens in so many cases, they are driven to despair, and they commit suicide rather than go on with that existence of starving lurking animals: or the girls of good families (I heard of three cases while I was there) go out on the streets and sell themselves to any man, to any foreign profiteer, for the sake of food and warmth.

"The real tragedy of what is happening, what has happened, is not apparent immediately: it dawns gradually, one sight after another, one incident after another. You do not come upon starving and emaciated children as you leave your hotel, but you begin to notice them creeping about in the narrower streets, or, as at night, I have seen them from the Hotel Bristol, sitting on the benches of the Ring, terrible little ghosts with bent shoulders and great

staring eyes, dressed in rags, always dirty and always hungry. And you find among all those who suffer silently day after day whining professional beggars who trade on a pity for what *they* do not suffer. And in the restaurants there are profiteers of all nationalities, French, Jewish, Italian, English, Germans and Austrians too, and cheap-money hunters, who come to Vienna just now and exploit the people and live in such ostentatious luxury as they have never enjoyed before. They eat, and buy in the shops, and go to the theatre and the opera, and patronise cabarets, and a night-life which has grown up to provide them with pleasure, and the opportunity to spend on pleasure.

"And behind all this grossness and glitter and luxury there is the real tragedy, and by contrast it seems even, if possible, more *macabre* and deathly."

"By the way—the oddest coincidence arose out of your account to me of the work out there, and the need for help!"

"What?"

"You remember Mrs. Chase of my hospital in Paris?"

"Yes." Edgar had a vision of a small, distrait woman in a white uniform. "Yes, quite well."

"Well, curiously enough, she was over in England about a fortnight ago, having just closed down her hospital, and came to see me, and was complaining of an unsatisfied desire to help humanity, and I mentioned Vienna and what you'd said, and in her magnificent and impulsive manner she's already managed to get out there."

"With whom is she working?" Edgar received Colin's perfectly candid look, perfectly direct explanation.

"With the American Relief people, I think. I simply had a card from her to the effect that she was there and——"

Edgar noted the sudden hesitation. It occurred to Colin, as absurd but conceivable, that Edgar might misconstrue Hope's final sentence, "Come out here soon." He finished abruptly, "And that she was hard at work already."

Edgar wondered just what Mrs. Chase had said, and why she had come to see Colin and why he had checked himself just now?

"Then if you go for Lessor you will be out there together!"

Colin hadn't, until this moment, entirely realised this: the prospect was pleasantly a coincidence, but without significance.

"I like the prospect; I like her very much, in a way, though I don't think I ever feel she's quite real——" He recollected with a certain amusement their breakfast together in Norfolk—Hope re-equipped for motoring in her green hat and grey coat, very grave and talkative, very efficient with Mrs. Cook's ungainly teapot; himself "early-morningish" (for Hope was to start at eight-thirty so as to do a detour by Stratford on her way back to London). Hope had discussed Christian Science, and he had felt sleepy, but compelled to admiration of her matitudinal "equipped" manner.

"She has an imposing little manner, I thought."

"She *is* rather imposing, at moments."

It was clear to Edgar that whatever, so far, Mrs. Chase had imposed on Colin it wasn't what she had apparently, by her activities, by a kind of emotional "lassoing," desired to impose. He changed the subject.

"Are you staying in London now?"

"At my club. I shall stay until Lessor wants me to go." Colin got up, walked to the window (the window—Edgar felt it all again so vividly—from which he had watched Colin and John walk away down Bedford Street on that hot August morning five years ago).

"How is Lady Renner?" Colin asked.

Edgar realised the trend of thought and replied gently: "Well, I think, though she is not so indefatigable as she used to be."

"And Wendy?"

"Wendy is growing up."

"I suppose she must be sixteen by now?"

"Almost. She feels that she is very 'mondaine' and wise in the ways of the world."

Colin smiled. "Small, fat Wendy," and added with an inconsequent bitterness, "How horrible, somehow!"

Edgar said lightly, watching Colin's back, "It's hard to blame the youngest generation for growing up."

"Queer world to grow up to!"

"It isn't really so 'queer' to them as it is to me, or to

you, who have known the other world. Any 'queerness' only reaches them insidiously from the atmosphere, and makes them perhaps a little unbalanced and intolerant; but I do not think that it reaches their consciousness or their observation. After all, it is almost their native air, what we consider abnormal! The reactions of the war are their natural heritage."

"Not a very 'goodly heritage'!"

"No. But I believe all the same that some things are better for them and that a certain quantity of 'cant' and pretence and encumbering social convention has been consumed in the flames. But it is difficult to tell yet: to see how much the superficial conditions of the old order will re-establish themselves, and how much real cleansing has taken place."

"I don't believe that what people referred to in a kind of grandiloquent way as 'Armageddon' has brought about any revelations, except the revelation that civilisation is still little more than a certain spread and advance in creature comforts, and that we aren't essentially much more than luxurious barbarians! Organised scientific barbarism—in peace and war. All our 'cant' about 'right' and 'war to end war,' and then one saw what it was really like. One hears people talk glib commonplaces about the war, pour out cheap sympathy to the 'victims of the war.' One's tempted just to describe some of its actualities to them, to make them see a picture of a leprous earth covered with the swollen, blackening corpses of hundreds of men—the stench of rotting carrion, and the sickening smell of exploded lyddite and ammonal. Mud like porridge, trenches like shallow cracks in the porridge, porridge that stinks in the sun. Swarms of flies and blue-bottles clustering on pits of offal. Wounded men lying in shell-holes among decaying corpses. Men with their lungs shot away, with blinded, smashed faces, torn bodies, limbs blown off. Men screaming and gibbering, wounded men hanging in agony on the barbed wire until a merciful spout of liquid fire shrivels them up like an insect in a candle. And we marched about singing a ghastly song about 'a silver lining' which more or less summed up what people *wanted* to think about it all."

Edgar shuddered at the cool, bitter presentment of what his generation hadn't known, of which they had borne only the reverberations.

"Glory," Colin breathed, "King and Country, 'Brave Boys'—cant! Peace Conferences, Reconstruction, Election Pledges, 'New Worlds for Old'—pitiable cant! Two thousand years of Christianity haven't taught us to love one another."

"All the same, I believe that Humanity has made progress. The war was the result of an international system."

Colin came and faced Edgar again across the desk. "I do admit that with the terribly slow spread of mental enlightenment there is probably coming to be less hatred and more tolerance among individuals. Perhaps people are just beginning to learn to think socially, but I don't believe there's more than one human man or woman in a thousand who can think internationally, and until the majority can I don't see any hope of lasting peace."

"But, Colin, you cannot abolish patriotism. That is something fundamental, like the love for one's children."

"I don't want to. But real love for your children isn't greedy and scheming and resentful and jealous of good in other people's children. There's nothing fine or beautiful in national egotism and greed and a deliberate scorn, or patronage of other nations. What has patriotism come to be but greed and false pride, when the only way it can show itself is by shedding blood to gain gold? More economic advantage, more territory! More power! The politicians and financiers and traders of each nation watching and scheming against other nations. That isn't, to me, loving your country. I've met hundreds of men who'd never seen or felt the loveliness of English country (only played golf over it or motored through it in clouds of dust), who'd never bothered to read the amazing literature of the English language, or dreamed of troubling to walk into the National Gallery—who had never paused to consider what it was that made one proud to be an Englishman—and yet who laughed at the French, despised the Germans, dismissed the Americans as 'Yanks,' and don't trouble to know more of Italy than 'macaroni.' It's that

sort of opinion, that sort of crude, facile egotism, that makes one so sick with 'patriotism.' It makes one——"

The telephone rang: Edgar took up the receiver. "Yes, very well, in a moment." He apologised to Colin. "A man I have promised to see about the publication of some memoirs."

"Of course. I've been detaining you as it is."

"Come again, if you have time, to see me before you go. You had better ring up Lessor and say you are going to see him to-morrow morning."

"I can't thank you enough."

Edgar shook his head. "It is little enough I am able to do for you, Colin."

"I shall try and justify your judgment to Lessor."

"Of that I am sure."

Colin had suddenly a dreadful choking sense that he was going to cry, and knew that Edgar understood and wanted to help him to keep steady. One's beastly nerves—— He let go Edgar's hand, strode blindly through the outer office, a confusion of typing and white shirts and brown tables, down the staircase, and out into the street.

A barrel organ was playing—something familiar, droning out the music: the tune droned and lilted in the amber air of the afternoon (something familiar?). Colin, approaching it, felt his senses battered as though by the roar of an insane creaking torrent, the brown smiling face under the yellow handkerchief was near him; he pushed half a crown into her hand and passed tense and shivering—"Après la Guerre . . ." that was it, the thing, Elsie Janis thing, that they used to sing in the hospital in Paris——

The music creaked and droned and lilted behind him, pursuing his footsteps. The words came back to him, fragmentarily, inanely:

> "*After the* war
> *We shall be happier than be*fore,
> *And the girl*——"

Colin, cursing himself for a fool, a child, a lunatic, reached the Strand shaking from head to foot, the tears pouring down his cheeks—hardly conscious of where he was going. Then some vague, sane prompting was for a taxi. "Taxi,"

his mind babbled to him. "Taxi," but he couldn't say it. He waved his stick. Thank heaven, here was one stopping.

The taxi man stared, compassionate, a little afraid.

"Where to, sir?"

Colin jerked out the address of his club.

The man seemed reassured by the address. Colin sank back in the taxi, shut his eyes for a second, prayed to any unnamed deity to give him back control. He was startled and afraid of himself—— Mad, he thought, I must be mad to let go like this——

He opened his eyes and looked out of the windows: a traffic block by Charing Cross; ordinary, busy, roaring London on a late September afternoon; scarlet, flaunting omnibuses, cars, taxis, crowds surging to and fro on the pavements. Now the block ceased—one was moving on again, crossing Trafalgar Square, the lions and Whitehall, with its air of clean official grandeur, sweeping down towards Westminster.

Ghastly, ghastly to lose control like this: that barrel organ, that tune (awful tune): and seeing Edgar again, and all the things that had been there, in the atmosphere, rustling, beautiful, invisible things, and then screeching away into the distance, into the past.

Lovely, lovely and unreal afternoon: gold dust in the air, dying summer and autumn in the trees down there in St. James's Park, leaves like green and tawny flames burning to winter. And people, small, spruce creatures, going up and down the Mall to breathe the gold-dusted air and feel the breath of summer; summer who was laughing at them, calling them out by the glow of her look and the murmurs of her lovely voice; and dying before their eyes, only they didn't see.

IX

"You're sure it won't be too tiring for you if we have the Lakings and the Connors as well as your people for the week-end of the twenty-third?"

George put down his paper and looked at his wife across the carriage. They were travelling up to London after three days spent in the constituency.

Zina shook her head. "Not a bit, my dear. By the way, I spoke to Rosamund Laking after our meeting on Tuesday night and she wants us to come to them for Christmas. I think it would be a good idea. The more you're seen about in that part of the country the better."

George got up and shut the window—he turned to an elderly woman in the further corner of the carriage.

"I hope you don't mind, I thought it was rather draughty for my wife."

The woman acquiesced. "I was feeling the cold myself" —and turned again to stare on the flying November landscape.

He resumed his seat opposite Zina.

"Of course I'd like to go to the Lakings in some ways, partly for political reasons, as you say (it's a bore in a way, this not living in the constituency), but I thought perhaps you'd like to be at home, at Croxtons, for Christmas."

She didn't want to hurt his feelings:

"I think perhaps it would be a good thing to give the servants a respite, as we've got so many people coming for New Year."

"Perhaps you're right. By the way, I hope Wendy's staying on afterwards. I promised I'd give her some hunting in the Christmas holidays."

"She'll adore that—you're awfully sweet to her, George." She wanted him to feel that, at least for some things, she could be grateful. She wondered if he'd taken her implication. She wondered, as his head and shoulders disappeared again behind the rustling barricade of *Morning Post*, whether he ever deduced from words more than the actual sense that their grouping presented to him; whether he was ever aware of the shadowy play of thought and emotion beyond the defined gates of words, the half-lit garden, alleys leading to darkened distances, flickering lights on waters gleaming through trails of queer blossoms, fantastic, shuddering trees, spasmodic great stars and scudding clouds; the silence and shadows beyond the gates which seemed to hold the very essence of another Being, so that, peering between all that wrought-iron verbosity, one began in spirit to explore, and perhaps to know and understand a little.

She could see just the top of his head now above the paper, bronzed forehead and bowler hat. What would he think (laugh at her, of course, a little annoyed!) if she were to say, "We're so apart because in our silences we wander into different worlds, never hand in hand, with the same little pang of understanding in our hearts, the same wonders and recoils, the same groping for one another in the dark caverns?" What *did* George think? Were there (she didn't believe there were) any, save quantitative, reticences; any, but deliberate, obscurities? His sentences were just samples of rows of other sentences packed together, neatly catalogued, making up his whole mentality. And yet one couldn't, by association, discounting the spasms of resentment and irritation, help becoming, in a way, fond of him, because one was so sorry for him.

"Seems to be rather a good new show at the Vaudeville!" he remarked, through the noise of the train.

She nodded. His eyes fell on the unopened book at her side. She abruptly recollected, felt herself blush, laid her hand instinctively over the title. But he said calmly:

"I tried to read that book yesterday evening. Couldn't get on with it a bit. That psychological nonsense is overdone. Doesn't interest me in the slightest."

Her defence, her, perhaps absurd, vicarious guiltiness, had been unnecessary, her sense of complicity ludicrous. She relaxed, nonchalantly took up the book.

"And the title! As ridiculous as the book. I was bored stiff after ten pages," he added.

Zina glanced down at the gilt lettering on the maroon binding, "HOUSEHOLD GODDESSES." She smiled to herself. George frowned, as he did when he supposed that she was thinking herself "cleverer": he visibly checked a further comment and took up *Country Life*. When he looked up at her again, to see her absorbed in the book, he was mollified: he surveyed her, the black curve of her hat-brim over her pale face and glowing hair, the silken darkness of her fur coat, the perfection of her gloves. He was gratified. He had given her the coat as a wedding present, had chosen the hat with her; the gloves they had bought together in Paris.

Zina glanced up at George; their glances met—the impact was without significance.

"We ought to be in in ten minutes now. You said you were lunching with a woman, didn't you?"

"Yes—I'd better meet you at Paddington for the 5.55. I told cook we should be home for an early dinner."

"Right. By the way, you might go to Best's if you're passing and tell them to hurry up with those shirts of mine!"

"Very well." Zina's glance relapsed to the book on her lap, to the final chapter of Olive's book, the woman explaining to her husband why she must leave him, and why she hates him:

". . . When I married you I loved you. I was happy because I could breathe the same air as you. I wanted to live, soul and mind and body, for you——

"But you didn't need what I could give you through my love. You didn't want a woman with a living mind and soul. Day after day and week after week I grew to understand. I came to see that your interpretation of love was just ownership, and your ideals were the ideals of a racing stud. I came to understand that you hadn't ever loved me, or needed my love. Because I was young I believed that your obstinacy was strength, that your proprietary way of treating me was affection, that desire was a greater passion. I was a fool, but my illusion was bled from my veins drop by drop."

Zina commented curiously, "She must have loved him!" She leaned back and shut the book on her lap. The train was rattling like a speeding sea-serpent above the ocean of leaden roofs, which seemed to surge up on either side in choppy, metallic waves.

Later in the day she spoke to Olive of the book. They had luncheon together at a Soho restaurant where "Gauginesque" frescoes, women with large tangerine coloured limbs, stared on the consumption of Italian cookery.

Olive, fitting her cigarette into a long holder, asked the question. Zina was frank.

"It's astonishingly 'uneven.' You're so good when you imply emotion, and restrain it behind a lot of significant

trivialities—and it didn't seem so good to me when you let go over feelings. It's as if you'd written half of it with your mind, and half of it with your heart—instead of quite co-ordinating the two processes."

Olive was silent.

"Clever of you," she said at last. "I suppose that's just what I have personally never been able to achieve—in living, I mean, quite apart from writing. This 'co-ordinating,' as you call it. Probably the secret of the 'good life' too! One's mind and one's emotions pull different ways." She laughed, drooping her eyelids.

"Yesterday a young man asked me to marry him. . . ."

"Shall you?"

"No. He's five years younger than I am, and rather gallant and romantic about me. He's too good to disillusion. He inclines to be chivalrous and think life has been unjust to me!"

"But don't you think so?"

Olive didn't answer, but looked straight into Zina's eyes.

"Do *you*—think of life in that way?"

"No—I think it all just comes—or goes."

"I agree."

"But then nothing makes one so easily a fatalist as—indifference."

"Don't you care about the baby though?"

"I hope I shall die. I don't hope violently or bitterly, you know—I just hope so."

"Foolish child!"

"And then you could go back to George"—Zina had one of her moments of absolute illumination—"because you love him in spite of everything."

Olive looked at her from under heavy lids.

"I know—but may I be preserved from a return to—to that spiritual tyranny!"

There was a silence between them. Suddenly Zina found herself saying—with a sense that somehow a kind of stinging raw truth were saying itself through her:

"Olive, I believe you and I and our complexities and resentments and despairs are all—a little boring and unnecessary. We doubt, we divert ourselves to despair—and we do nothing—we don't matter!"

Olive's smile enigmatically dawned and died. "How damnably right you are! Coffee for two please, waiter. . . ."

X

It was this sense of her own futility that came back to Zina that evening as she sat alone after dinner in the drawing-room at Croxtons. George had gone to write some letters to go off by the morning's early post.

She sat in one of the high-backed cinquecento chairs, and the fire dogs, craning up like grotesque greyhounds on either side the pyre of logs, winked distantly at her, as though they had some secret which they would never come near enough to her to impart. But she met their leering and staring brazenly, to show them she didn't care—that whatever they shared between them over that stacked glowing mass didn't matter to her.

She turned her wedding ring idly on her finger, ironically it conjured up Olive's face leaning toward her across the table; that dark little restaurant with its faint smells of wine and oil and coffee, and the waiters, harassed and excited, flitting at the feet of those yellow-limbed goddesses.

Olive's face, the exhausted, deep-lidded blue eyes and the enigmatic twist of her mouth (one wondered at moments whether that wasn't deliberate, the effective pathos of that twist). Olive saying in her husky voice, "I envy you, Zina, and yet I wouldn't be back in your place for the moon; curious." So often Olive commented "Curious!"—as if that quality alone redeemed for her the configuration of life.

The sparks flew up the chimney like a host of pigmy comets.

"Futile," Zina whispered to them. "futile"—and started back a little as though her own whisper had brushed unexpectedly against her cheek.

Just how important was it that she and Olive, that aimless woman of a protected class, should have their vague, insatiable conceptions of happiness satisfied? They toiled not—neither did they—well, whatever in the modern disposition of sheltered womanhood "spinning" represented—some kind of fulfilment of responsibility anyway.

Olive had married, through her own free will, a man whom she expected to be different from his essential nature. She had been bitterly disappointed; felt herself oppressed and tormented by him, though his existence as her husband had been the result of her own love. And when the war made the air heavy with greater portents, when the rigidity of conventions slackened and more easily gave way under a greater pressure, and the flow of social life grew swollen and reckless, she had broken away—flaunting her embitterment as the justification of her cause. And then again life, as she believed, had failed her—— Disillusion!

And she, Zina, had married him through her own free will. (Free will? A goblin cackled up the big chimney.) She had married him for whatever things—the greater thing having been torn from her—she could get. And he had given them to her. The occupation of a pleasant married life. And in his way (for after all she had chosen him!) he was fond of her, loved her. She had married him exploiting her attraction for him, and his merely physical attraction for her, exploiting her own strange hardness. She, at any rate, had no claim to the luxurious martyrdom of disillusion. She couldn't anyway adopt any pitiful pose (to which at least Olive had some claim). She couldn't build herself a tower, reproach, grief, resentment, scorn, despair, brick upon lurid brick, and look down from the high bleak window—with scorched eyelids and half a laugh for what she'd left. She had to stay (which avoided self-ridicule or pretence) *terre-à-terre*—as she'd deliberately begun. There wasn't for her any question of rebellious wings and new horizons. She'd found what she'd set out to find. Perhaps she hadn't (for "indifference" gave one a pervasive blindness, a kind of imaginative ineptitude) understood that it would work out like this. One hadn't foreseen the days and hours and minutes of this life with George—merely glanced forward to a broad supposition of what it would all be like.

And then, for a moment, her mind was a little clear-eyed spirit outside herself, asking with an unswerving gaze: "Are you worth any more? Why should you think you are worth jade and crystal—rosewater and courts of almond blossom? What have you ever done — you — you — you——?"

"I lost Colin."

The spirit's voice was gentle but clear:

"But you lost something more than Colin in selling yourself to a cheap oblivion—in betraying the truth in yourself. This is your greater tragedy."

"But I'd lost Colin."

"But seeing what you've done, were you ever worth his love? Were you ever worth Colin?"

"I could have been. I could have been."

"But you betrayed his memory to your own cowardice."

"What's happened since has no significance, no relation to him."

"Your love for him was truth to you and you betrayed the truth; you cheapened your soul."

"Truth and light for me were lost with him."

"That isn't real! You pretend that to excuse yourself."

"But nothing matters now."

"Being true to your own sense of truth matters—to the very end."

"I am futile; the harm is done."

"You are weak, but you could be strong."

"I was brought up to be happy and then my youth was wrenched and twisted through no fault of mine."

"You are weak, weak, weak——"

"But with Colin, I could have been strong."

"But you must be able to stand alone—for in the end you go alone into your own dark tunnel. Your soul is your own——"

"I have no belief."

"Belief is light and hope. But you can know right from wrong in the dark, as a blind man knows heat from cold."

"Without belief there's no strength for me."

"Without strength there can be no belief."

But she came back to the "I am futile."

"You are killing your own soul."

"I have no soul any more."

"Again you pretend to yourself. There is a frozen sleep that isn't death—yet."

"I never want it to wake."

"Because you are afraid—afraid of pain and remorse and shame."

"There's no need."

"But there might come a time! There might be—might be——"

A log shifted and fell apart with a soft thud and new pale flames shot up from the heaped glow of embers. The lacquer clock in the corner struck a nervous, unresolved chime (quarter to—) and Zina could hear outside in the night, beyond the heavy brocade folds of the curtains, the wind hissing and moaning and staggering among the trees.

The uncompleted harmonies of the clock chime dragged oddly at her vitals like a sly physical pain.

XI

Colin took the note from Ludwig, the concierge of the hotel. He was to fetch her (she had a knack of imperious notes) at 9, Elizabethstrasse, at seven o'clock. "At our H.Q." she had said; the "our" might have been the imperial singular. But she wrote on the paper of the American Relief Administration: the "our" might therefore, and more probably (he smiled to himself) in his case, identify her with a cause and a company.

He asked her at dinner:

"What's your particular work? You personally, I mean?"

"I distribute soup." She had this way of saying with an utter gravity a phrase that another woman might have dropped whimsically with a smile.

Colin felt again, as he had felt in Paris in the hospital, her competence, her single-mindedness. And he wondered whether the essence in her mentality which he had in light moments dubbed her "uplift" weren't, after all, the source of her unaccountable and persistent energy. She was fixing him now with her look, but no longer strangely and a little wistfully. Now he became sensible, through her direct look, of the quality of her father and grandfather who had made the "pile" from which she could gaze, compassionate and richly aloof, on the world—or climb down those golden slopes to the chaos below and move about down in these darker places wearing a kind of halo of the gold-suffused upper air. He became sensible of the

drive and energy and tirelessness of those small men who had known what they wanted; whose faith had removed mountains and raised another mountain which could enshrine their daughter on a level with Olympus. He could feel the uncanny, practical power of these little far-off Americans coming through her—rarified by her potential leisure and cherished nervous femininity to an almost spiritual energy.

". . . the figures," she was saying, "are extraordinarily interesting. Dr. Merrick was showing them to me yesterday."

Suddenly she relaxed and leant back in her chair, her look still fixed on Colin, but now again with that queer hint of pathos, a craving anxiety, in its misty depth. The look stirred a distant response in him (pity?—curiosity?—both?)

"I'm dead tired!" she said listlessly, and her eyes were strained, her face peaky under her hat brim. Colin took the small hand resting on the table. She shut her eyes and he could feel the tremor which ran from her wry mouth to the tips of her fingers. So, for a moment, she remained. Then she opened her eyes, and her smile was non-committal, her glance indifferent (and yet reserving—what?). She got up, summoning the waiter to put on her coat.

In the taxi she didn't speak, lay back in her corner, until they reached her lodgings.

Colin helped her out on to the pavement and for a second that unexplained appeal in her arrogant look made him afraid. She thanked him, a funny formal acknowledgment of his hospitality.

"I shall come then if I may to see you at work at your depôt?" He rang the bell for her and they stood side by side on the doorstep in the empty street.

"Yes," she said indifferently. The door was opened. Her hand clutched up to the violets pinned to her coat. Colin caught a whiff of their perfume in the icy air. She went in silently and the door was shut.

XII

In the Wahringerstrasse a pale-haired girl opened the door.

"Herr von Renner?"

The girl said, "Yes, Herr von Renner was awaiting him." He followed the girl up the lovely staircase.

The room was large and dim, illumined only by a sickly gas jet in a far corner and by the meagre glow of a gas fire turned so low that the upper two-thirds of the asbestos tracery seemed not to be heated at all, but remained like petrified arabesques of ashes.

"Herr von Renner?" Colin repeated into the inhospitable spaces of the room.

A figure hugging itself, a face peering above an astrakan collar, rose from an armchair by the dismal gas-fire.

"Mr. Russell?" The voice was loud but hesitating.

Colin approached the armchair, took the tremulously outstretched hand and was surprised at the fierceness of the grip.

"I am so very pleased you have come. So very pleased."

He looked, thought Colin, like a sombre Father Christmas; Father Christmas fallen on evil days, in a long coat with an astrakan collar (given him possibly by some grateful client of the days when a gentleman scarlet-hooded, could still drive his sledge and reindeer between Christmas Eve and morning!). Colin hadn't expected Edgar's brother, who had spent his prosperous days between Central Europe and South America, to look, however sadly and remotely, like Father Christmas.

"Please seat yourself."

Colin took the armchair on the other side of the gas-fire. Herr von Renner let himself down again into his chair. He was afraid (caressing his beard) that he had forgotten most of his English. They began to speak in German. Herr Russell spoke very well German, Alfred said, and eyed him from hollow sockets. (The tufty eyebrows, Colin was looking for any resemblance—were like Edgar's, only whiter). Alfred spoke of his brother's last letter, writing of Colin, saying that he was here for a newspaper. There was much, Alfred said, that they could together discuss. He drew his chair even nearer to the symbol of warmth so that his felt slippers would, with an ordinary allowance of heat, have been singed.

He spoke in the loud, uncertain tones of a nervous man, pausing every now and then to draw a difficult breath—and then excused his hesitations.

"I have had bronchitis," he explained, "and in general

much trouble with my throat and chest," and he hunched his collar closer about his ears. He spoke of his relations in England.

"My brother was lately here to visit me." Alfred nodded jerkily. "That was a great pleasure—a great joy!"

"I think that's how he got the idea of getting me sent out here."

"Yes—of course, of course. He found a very great change here. You also, I suppose?"

"It's my first visit."

"So! That's a pity for you. The place is like a Hell now—all chaos and disorder. Probably you observe that already."

"There's an awful kind of brooding atmosphere over the place!"

"My brother tells me you had shell-shock."

"Yes—but I'm recovered now."

"You look nervous."

"I don't think I am any more."

Colin had the sense rather of communing with a muffled up spirit than of talking to an old man: the dimness of their surroundings—the four-poster bed which seemed to be anchored like a demented ship in the further shades of the room, the velvety hissing of the gas-fire, Alfred's visible frailty combined with the somehow uncanny solidity of his speech (and the perfect normality of the matter of his speech)—all this was strange, pressing in on one's consciousness with all the unfulfilled insistence of a dream.

"How is your hotel?"

"Very good, thanks."

"Many people there?"

"Many—but none of them very prepossessing."

"So I should suppose. Wealthy but not prepossessing. It is astonishing how much business activity is now being established here by foreigners. Such a multiplication of new banks and firms: enormous business and gambling in the Exchange. This increases now every day. The extravagant luxury and extravagant gambling of the foreigner. The peace terms have been the death blow to any prudent policy of reconstruction here. We are letting go toward disaster. Whether Sir William Goode's mission

that has just been sent out by your government will have any effect I do not know——"

"The League of Nations——" Colin said tentatively.

"Whatever may be said the spirit of inflamed nationalism that led to the War is not yet quiescent—perhaps worse than ever."

"Personally, I feel if there's any hope for the future—it *is* on account of the League of Nations."

"*If*"—the old man drew still closer to the fire. "*If* it is only possible to get the people to believe in it as an instrument of peace, so that the governments of these peoples are pledged to support the League, then only can it become practical. Otherwise it will be only one ineffectual Conference after the other. The desire for peace should become an international religion."

The window rattled and Colin turned with a start.

"It is only the wind, Herr Russell! The place needs to be repaired!" He gave Colin again a more personal glance.

"What are your plans?"

"To stay out here I think, as long as my paper keeps me here."

"I hope then you will often come to see me. And if you should want any introductions, to any prominent officials or residents——"

"Thank you so much—you are good!"

"It is nothing, it is a pleasure to me to be of any service. Also you have been specially recommended to me by my brother."

Colin wondered—supposed that Edgar had told his brother about himself and Zina. Curiously he had come to resent the idea of anyone else knowing—a kind of profanity—a desecration, this vicarious talk, of something that one beautifully and strangely and painfully treasured. And then other people's casual words—like sweaty, clumsy fingers. He almost wished he'd never written of it, even to Edgar—only perhaps he alone understood how it had hurt.

But the old man made no reference to what—if he knew anything—he did know. And he had forgotten Colin again, as an individual; and was only afraid of the night, and to-morrow—and all the nights and days before him.

Colin got up.

"I must go."

Alfred pulled himself together.

"You will come again?" The sunken eyelids quivered.

"Yes indeed!"

Out in the street it had begun to snow. The wind drove the soft icy flakes against Colin's face: they came down thick and ceaseless and white out of the darkness, blotting out for him all consciousness of anything but snow and wind. They made him think of the Hans Andersen story that his mother, whom he could just remember, had read over and over again to him when he was a little boy, until he knew it by heart. (That big book with the blue and gold binding, and her hands turning over the pages)—it had been his favourite story—"The Snow Queen": Kay attaching his sledge to the big sledge that came through the market-place—that picture of the Snow Queen—"she was so beautiful he could not imagine a more sensible or lovely face. . . . And she always smiled at him and then it seemed to him that what he knew was not enough. . . . And she flew up with him . . . and the storm blew and whistled; it seemed as though the wind sang old songs . . . the wolves howled, the snow crackled. . . ."

XIII

The bedroom door clicked and was shut gently again, Zina opened her eyes—it was Wendy—hesitating lest Zina had really fallen asleep. Zina asked listlessly:

"Well—what d'you think of it?"

"Oh, Zina—I think it's a *darling!*" Wendy's blue eyes were wide and bright. She came and sat on a chair by the bed. "He's so tiny, Zina! And so funny and pink and ugly—and his comic miniature hands crinkle in and out all the time as if he was feeling hard what air was like!"

Zina, glancing at her sister's eager face, half smiled.

". . . He *is* ugly though——" Funny of Wendy to be so enthusiastic—Wendy who was so cool and blasé about most of life.

"But that's so awfully temporary. Everyone's like a pink frog to begin with; oh, Zina, he *does* think the world so odd! He stares and stares with round eyes and every

now and then he shrugs his shoulders as if he meant, "I suppose one gets accustomed to all this!"

"Where's Nanny?"

"Oh, she's deep in worship of 'the Object'—and talking to your nice nurse about all the babies they've either of them ever known—and what *you* were like as a baby, etc.——"

"Has Mummie gone?"

"Not yet. She said I could talk to you for about ten minutes and then come down and drive back with her to town. There are some people coming to dinner to-night. Oh, *listen* to your object yelling. He's got the devil of a temper!"

"I suppose that's from me."

Wendy regarded her sister for a moment.

"You're not bad-tempered, Zina—only disillusioned."

The remark cut through the warm white room—the atmosphere of roses and fresh linen and faintly of disinfectants—like the lash of a whip. Zina was startled; uttered involuntarily:

"How do *you*——"

Wendy crossed one slim leg over the other and leant back in her chair.

"I'm not *so* stupid, even if I *am* only sixteen and a half! D'you think I don't understand lots of things because I don't *say* them? My impression is that the people who say most understand least!"

"But——" Zina leaned up on her elbow. "But I'm *—not.*"

Wendy shook her brown head. "You don't deceive *me,* even if you think you're deceiving yourself, darling—(lie *back,* Zina—don't be stupid and try to sit up!)."

Zina found herself obeying. (Silly to obey Wendy. Physical pain left one so silly and weak.)

"Why should you think I'm disillusioned?"

"Don't hedge!"

Zina gave in. Wendy's directness, her uncompromising attack on what she wished to know and her cool acceptance of whatever she learnt or knew, was, when you *did* give way to it, rather restful. If Wendy's unsentimentality did, at moments, deprive her youthfulness of a certain

conventionalised "charm" generally attributed to "maidenhood" (a charm allied with the words "bloom" and "unspoiled"), it gave her anyway the companionable quality of being more a girl than a "schoolgirl," and more a "person," a real identity, than merely a "girl."

Zina's mind shifted to Wendy's clearer plane. (She realised, even as it did so, what a clinging chameleon of a mind she had: adjusting itself so easily to other people's mental hues and pattern—to George's sometimes: or to Olive's: or to her father's (that was *good*—good for one!)—or even—even to Wendy's. But now she wondered how far the glib "even" were justifiable: for there was in Wendy, somewhere, a certain strength.

"Are you sorry for me, Wendy?"

"Very—in a way."

"What way?"

"For the way—the way things have happened to you."

"Colin—you mean?"

"Partly."

"What else?"

"Well—it's happening to you—combined with your being the sort of person you are!"

"What—*what* sort of person d'you mean?"

Wendy hesitated: she wanted to spare Zina—Zina looked so lovely lying there, with all her dark-coppery hair shining in the light of the bed-side lamp.

"Well—you—you sort of run away from things—and then you—you don't look what you're doing and you run into other things!"

Zina said wryly: "Very nicely put!"

Wendy apologised earnestly: "I'm sorry. It *wasn't*—— You know I think you're one of the most charming lovely people I know—and you're clever and talented—if you weren't so damned lazy at your music. Only you are—well you were born to be a sort of happy Princess—and then——"

"The wrong Prince you mean"—Zina's whisper was bitter. She shut her eyes. "And you mean," she added, "that I should have been happier—in the end—if I *hadn't* taken the wrong one—if I'd just sat alone at the window all my life——"

Wendy said huskily: "Yes."

Zina's eyes were still shut. "I should have gone mad!"

They were silent. The clock ticked on the mantelpiece. They could hear the baby crying in the next room, but they weren't thinking about him any more.

Zina said at last:

"Daddy's so queer about Colin, Wenny!"

"How d'you mean?"

Zina wondered why she should be talking to Wendy like this——Funny—telling Wendy things——

"He came down here to see me and baby a few days ago (the day before you came back from school)—and—— Well, he asked me whether I wasn't happier—now that I've got baby—and I said I didn't think he made much difference, and *then*, I don't know *why* I said it—but I was still feeling pretty ill and just said what came into my head—I said I supposed one would feel different about a child if one loved one's husband very much, but I didn't think I should ever be *very* interested in this one. . . . And suddenly Daddy got up—and as he went out of the room I think he was crying."

"Daddy's an angel. It *was* odd of him though—I mean, to be so awfully——"

"Yes."

Wendy said abruptly: "I'm sorry for George. He's a dullard—but worthy. And I think he's awfully fond of you."

"He *is*—in his way."

"Weren't you *ever* in love with him, Zina?"

"Y-e-es—in a way."

"What way?"

"Oh—he just attracted me rather——"

"Physically you mean!" Wendy didn't quibble. "I think it was rather beastly of you to marry him—partly for that kind of reason——"

"Well—if he *hadn't* attracted me it would have been worse I think."

Wendy shook her head.

"No. I don't."

Zina gave in again. "Perhaps you're right—I don't know why I think so. But perhaps you are!"

Wendy sighed oddly. "Well—who can judge *any*one really—in this comic world?"

Nanny's head appeared round the door. "Wendy—your mother's calling you!"

"All right, Nan." Wendy got up and bent and kissed her sister.

"Good-bye, darling—I shall see you next week then—George says I can stay till the beginning of the summer term if I like."

"Do!—I hope I shall be up next week."

Wendy paused by the door.

"By the way, what's he going to be called?"

Zina grimaced, "George, I expect."

"After the popular hero 'Lloyd' of that name, I suppose!"

Wendy giggled, and disappeared.

Nanny stood at the end of the bed.

"I think you should have a sleep now all your visitors have gone, my lamb!"

"Very well, Nanny."

Nanny came and rested her broad cool hand on Zina's forehead.

"The little chap's sleeping soundly now," she said, "Nurse and I got him off at last."

Zina could have cried for the response that, even with her voice, she couldn't make. She changed the trend of the subject, conscious that Nanny only too well understood.

"Wendy seems pleased with her nephew."

Nanny said gently: "Wendy's at her best with children. She's naturally fond of them."

Zina took the unspoken—"as you aren't." She lay still.

"How lovely and soothing your hand is on my forehead, Nan!"

Nanny drew up the chair and sat down, without taking away her hand.

"I'll stay then, my lamb, till you go to sleep. . . . "

Zina replied drowsily: "You *are* a darling, Nanny—I'm so tired——" The drowsiness was closing in on her, growing thicker and sweeter, pressing on her like a soft heavy mist—heavier and heavier——

And Nanny sat, patient and unmoving; and she thought of how she had first held Zina as a baby twenty-five years before—and now, in the next room there was Zina's baby. And there came to her wise, gentle comprehension a wonder at the queer helplessness of new life, its blind struggling innocence, and its shaping or mis-shaping by the years.

XIV

There was a knock at Colin's door. There entered Florian, the simian "buttons"; the Gnädige Herr was wanted on the telephone.

Colin hurried down to the hall; Ludwig, precipitous and charming, ushered him into the telephone box. The voice was speaking from Alfred's lodgings—"Herr von Renner had had two bad heart attacks during the night, brought on by his bronchitis. He had asked for Herr Russell—could he perhaps come round now, this very evening?"

Colin found Alfred propped up on his pillows in the big four-poster bed which had seemed at first like an ungainly ship moored in the shadows of the room. The room felt chilly, for the Spring nights had, as yet, brought no warmth.

The fair girl with the dismal cough was seated by the bed reading aloud. She rose at Colin's entrance and came and spoke to him at the door. They spoke in low tones:

"How is he?"

"Just now he is quiet—but he is very weak. He has been weak for so long now—and these were not the first heart attacks this winter. The doctor has not great hope."

"Has he fever?"

"Only great weakness—and then with the bronchitis he has spasms when he cannot get his breath."

"Won't it tire him if I see him?"

"He has asked for you—and that cannot now make very much difference."

She went out, closing the door gently behind her.

Colin approached the bed. The old man's eyes were shut:

the bones of his forehead overshadowed the eye-sockets, his cheek bones jutted out under the livid shrunken skin: the white beard and hair and eyebrows looked as though they had been gummed on to the sunken deathly face. He started with the sense of an approach and opened his eyes: when he perceived Colin the glare of alarm subsided.

"That is good of you—to come."

Colin sat down on the chair by the bedside.

"I'm so sorry that you've been so ill."

A whimsical distant expression crossed the hollowed features. "It is nothing—at my age." He shut his eyes again as though he hadn't the strength to keep them open or to endure even the dim light from the gas-jet on the other side of the room. His thoughts sped away and returned suddenly to a courteous enquiry.

"And how is Mrs. Chase?"

"I saw her yesterday. She is well, though she works very hard."

"She looks a delicate woman."

"Looks more delicate than she apparently is."

"Perhaps that is so——" again the thought sped into what was for Colin a silent obscurity. He waited, anxiously watching the old man's face, the gnarled white hand that clutched at a fold of the coverlet.

Suddenly Alfred asked:

"You are happy?"

The question was unexpected.

"I don't—think about it."

"You are wise perhaps. My brother has told of course all that had happened——"

"But that's all over."

Still Alfred didn't open his eyes, lay as though he were speaking through unconsciousness.

"In life nothing is over until all is over. You have not seen my niece—since the war?"

"No. She's married."

"I know—to an Englishman older than yourself."

Colin said abruptly: "I know nothing about him. I don't want to."

"Suppose that you meet her when you are again in England—England is small——"

"One can avoid the possibility fairly easily——"

"But if you did——"

"I should—go away at once."

"But if she wished you to stay?"

"She wouldn't—naturally. She's married."

The old man paused for a second.

"Mrs. Chase too—is married!"

"I don't see——"

Again a whimsical look crossed the haggard face on the pillows.

"There is in you, Herr Russell, something 'ingénue'——"

Colin shook his head.

"Mrs. Chase is no more in love with me than I with her. We're friends, we see each other frequently—but——"

"I have lived for seventy years in the world. I am not so stupid."

"You don't know Mrs. Chase, sir."

"It is possible *you* do not."

"Anyway I'm quite *certain*. . . ." Colin paused, the old man was breathing harshly and painfully.

"Can I . . . do anything?"

Alfred shook his head. Gradually the breathing grew quiet again. He turned his head on the pillow so that he could look straight at Colin.

"The departure is often tedious," he said, "and I have never liked to make a great 'fachsen' about my affairs. But I had wanted you to come to-night because I shall not live very long now—and it is more pleasant to say good-bye when there is not a crowd of doctors and people about." His harsh, nervous voice had grown gentle, as though he felt that there was no longer anything to fear: his sudden half-humorous, half-tolerant dignity brought peace to the room.

"I should not like to have"—a smile lurked in the Father Christmas beard—"what the English call 'a death-bed scene,' just as I do not like to make a great business of my 'abreise' when I go on a journey." The gaze of the sunken eyes slowly sought remote things. "Seventy years is a long life," he said, "and for me it is enough, for now I am only a survival. The life of to-day, and above all, such terrible chaotic life as there is here in

Vienna, is not precious to me. The life of to-day is not my life—and the changes already all over the world are so great that I have the feeling that I am no longer alive. I remain from another age and from a world and a society that does not survive. All this——" He faintly indicated the half-lit chilly room—"All this is not real to me—and all that is happening now—all the chaos and the reconstruction that must result from that chaos, that has nothing to do with the life I have known. My life has belonged to the days of great fortunes and small etiquettes. I have grown up here in a society of great imperial tradition, while France lived under the Second Empire and Germany was growing up to Imperialism and Russia was under its Czars—in those days diplomacy was not ashamed still to think in terms of the balance of power—and kings and emperors made alliances and secret pacts; and all over Europe and America the big banking and commercial families were establishing their wealth and their power—the Rothschilds—the Vanderbilts; and nations and men schemed and worked for wealth and for power. . . . I can see that much of it was wrong, and that the pomp and much of the ceremony and riches was . . . artificial—perhaps. But to me it was real—and much of it has seemed gracious and beautiful—and I am glad that I have lived and moved in such times.

"My brother Edgar, he can think and adapt himself more easily. Perhaps it is because he is ten years younger —perhaps because the life of England has been less conventional than here. I have seen that our Empire was wrong and oppressive—and I have seen through my business the kind of exploitation from which the great fortunes have so often grown. Politically and socially the foundations of my world were wrong—but I, all the same—I have been glad to live in those times, and though such a society has perhaps deserved to die, it is not possible to tell if what grows out of the chaos of to-day will be any better. Much space and leisure has been swept away with the old order —and who knows if what comes will be better, for the nature of people has not changed."

The old man held Colin with a probing impersonal look:

"Who can say, when Man has abolished war and poverty and suffering—what will be left for him? And whether any great art or great moral goodness can come from unmenaced peace and equality? What will become of the human spirit when there is no longer pain or danger or uncertainty?"

The voice sank to a laboured whisper—the eyes closed: the groping spirit seemed, with the wasted body, to sink into a dark silence. And Colin sat and listened to the irregular, difficult breathing and the velvety hissing of the meagre gas-fire.

XV

"It was very tragic," Hope said, "the death of old Von Renner. He had really beautiful, old-fashioned manners," she said, and looked at Colin with an expression he had come to know so well and comprehend so little, an expression at once diffuse and penetrating, aloof and painful—her kitten eyes dilated as though she sought some undetermined thing over icebound regions.

He knew that she wasn't thinking any more of the old man's death that had taken place a week ago, in the early morning after Colin had left him.

With a swift, impatient gesture she pushed the waves of ashen gold hair back from her brow.

"I could scream with nerves to-night," she said, and walked up to a mirror and stared at her own staring sallow face. There was no criticism in her stare, no appraisement, only a profound agitated interest. Colin met her reflected glance.

"You've been overworking."

The vibration of her nerves filled the room—woke a response in him. He felt his lips sticky, his forehead hot and heavy. The ornately furnished room, the pink-shaded electric light disturbed him, oppressed him. She wouldn't keep still. She kept moving round the room, moving ungracefully, stopping in jerks to finger an ornament or gaze at a picture—and go on again. The vibrations in the atmosphere reached his sensibilities like a million pricking needles. She moved, restless and uncertain—moved to and fro, without a word, her mouth set in a wide quivering line.

"No," she said at last, and her monosyllable ripped the atmosphere and left it raw, and Colin flinched. She added with a blank smile: "I have certainly not been overworking: work is my element." She came and stood with her back to the fireplace: the edge of the mantelpiece supporting the nape of her neck. He felt her as a force—a brooding spirit, as absurdly a herald of an insane electric storm that threatened them both. Her hand groped and shook like a madman's in the folds of her dress.

"Have a cigarette," she said, and he thought she was going to laugh.

"Thanks." He heard his own voice. He got up and took the unopened box off the mantelpiece. His fingers tore open the paper band with an exaggerated speed and force.

"Give me one," she commanded, without turning her head to look up at him. He fumbled out the first cigarette.

"Put it between my lips."

He obeyed.

"Light it."

He obeyed and the wide gaze fixed on something beyond his hand—beyond the corner of the room—never once flickered. She might have been in a trance, but he was near enough to hear and feel her quick, unsteady breathing.

He thought, "We're both of us going off our heads—or she's going to have a nervous collapse or something——" He pulled himself together.

"Hope—what's the matter?—what's the *matter*——?" His words rattled out like dice.

She still gazed into that corner of the room.

"I adore you," she said, and her flat tones were strained taut and hard. "I love you, Colin, with my whole soul. I adore you. I wish that I could die for you." She made her statement and no expression touched her small icy face.

He was humiliated, agonised:

"Hope . . . Hope, my *dear*. . . . "

She checked him with a faint imperious gesture.

"You don't love me." She spoke with a passing piteous insolence. "You have never been in love with me for a second. That is your loss. I have renunciation. But you have nothing. I love, very greatly—and you do not. I have known a long time that I should love you, but I

wouldn't be afraid. . . . I am not afraid." She drew up her slight rigid body. "I am not afraid of pain because I love you and you are indifferent. I love where I choose, I love you because I'm strong enough."

He was so desperately, blindly sorry for her. His pity dazed and unnerved him, dizzied his reason. This frail, arrogant creature, telling him, indifferently, with a kind of fantastic Olympian condescension that she loved him; telling him, her queer misty eyes dark with a pain which she proudly and wearily cherished, that she worshipped him. Her nearness, her frailty, the fear and the pain and obstinacy in her look, wrenched at his heart, dizzied his senses: he caught a breath of her scent—a fold of her dress shivered against his hand. He bent blindly and took her in his arms and kissed her mouth, and her fragile throat . . . and felt her yield, abandon herself with a queer ecstatic despair, and then, suddenly grow rigid and hurl herself backward from his grasp.

She staggered back against the mantelpiece, staring at him, her eyes like queer flames:

"How *dare* you," she whispered slowly, incredulously, one hand grasping at her throat. "How *dare* you? Kiss me . . . like that . . . kiss me on the mouth and hold me in your arms because . . . because you are sorry for me? Kiss me—because you don't—love me?" Her hand crept up her throat to her mouth—she dragged the back of her hand across her lips—and Colin noted, beyond his whirling emotions, the smudge of crimson on the knuckles as her hand fell to her side.

"How you could *dare* . . . lewd—shameful—humiliating . . . !" All her rare exclusiveness, all her Puritanism, all her dramatic subtleties burned in a high pure barrier, hedged her about with flames of indignation, irradiated her with martyrdom. She was illumined not merely for herself, but even for Colin, who perceived all the possibilities of the ludicrous and unreasonable in her behaviour. She was illumined for him, and excused and transfigured, despite his consciousness of her having "put him in a position," by her sense of her own rightness.

He recognised most vividly at this moment, when by all ordinary standards she had forfeited her pride and her own

and her husband's honour and had no claim to any homage but pity, how supremely and superbly she *did* move, through her own utter unconsciousness of absurdity or egotism, on a different plane—in an Olympian atmosphere where there were no considerations but her own, and where she was unquestionably and completely justified.

She spoke quickly now.

"You have spoiled for yourself a very great and very beautiful thing. You could have had from me the very great and wonderful friendship that my love would have enabled me to give you."

He was sorry, he was ashamed, he cursed himself for a clumsy beast. But she continued more and more in this high perfect tone. (Banal—piteous—maddening.)

" . . . You have defiled my love for you—you have profaned its spiritual beauty."

(He remembered her swift, sudden yielding, but her look never wavered.)

" . . . We could have gone on so wonderfully."

(Unreal, he thought, unreal, but he felt her victory, felt her as standing forth grandly and mystically victorious.) Her face crumpled in an expression of pain, the tears stained her sallow cheeks. She was superb and pitiful.

"I never asked you to love me, Colin. . . ."

(*Hadn't* she—but what, then, was "all this" for?)

"Perhaps my husband and the work I can do need me more than you do—and I shall go where my duty seems to call me."

(Vocation again—this idea that he—might have been her "vocation"—not so much her husband or her lover or even her friend, but a great and significant fulfilment of *her* power to love. And this, so far as he could fathom her restrained and (consciously?) beautiful despair, was her essential pain—the unfulfilment of this conception of her own power to love passionately and perfectly.)

"But, Hope. . . ." He felt how inadequate his words were. "I admire you, feel you to be *amazing*—unlike any woman. . . . "

She ignored his words.

"This is the end," she said—the phrase of a hundred melodramas, a hundred "thrilling" episodes. But her

quality gave rareness and intensity to the words—as physical beauty dominates a dull garment. And she repeated as though conscious of all the rarified significance she gave to whatever she said,

"This is the end, Colin."

His protests, his sense of exaggeration, of hysteria, died under her glance.

"Good-bye, then—Hope." And for the second time in their relation he kissed her hand.

She took the homage with indifference, yet seemed with her last wide look to grant him a forgiveness born of compassion.

Twenty-four hours later he heard from a doctor of the American Mission that Mrs. Chase had left for New York. She had the faculty and means to override, easily and beautifully, the minor limitations of Time and Space.

XVI

It was in the summer of 1922 that Zina took her son, Charles John Everard Barrett-Saunderson, then aged two and a half, to the Zoo, a treat planned for him by Cynthia. Zina and the baby were staying with her for a few weeks in the Westminster flat while George was down in the constituency.

Charles was an animal-loving, not an engine-worshipping, little boy, and he was dumb with pleasurable anticipation as he passed through the turnstile with his mother and grandmother into a garden where he had been assured he would meet those lions and tigers and zebras whose portraits he had so often admired in books at home.

Lions were his first objective. He was always certain of his grandmother's attention, but he seized his mother's hand to ensure her listening:

"Tsarles want to see lions."

"Very well, darling." Zina smiled, high above her son's round auburn head, at Cynthia. Charles' sentences, brief and urgent, nearly always began "Tsarles want . . ."

They arrived at the lion house at a propitious moment: it was feeding time. As they entered the house the beasts were roaring, padding and swerving to and fro behind the bars of their cages. The roars became deafening as the

keeper approached each cage and flung in great hunks of raw flesh. But Charles was undismayed.

"Lions eat!" he remarked and pulled at Zina's hand to get nearer the barrier. Cynthia indicated the keeper:

"That's the man who looks after them." Charles understood "status."

"Lions, Nannie!" he said, then stood silent for a few minutes at the spectacle of carnivorous rapture. Cynthia lifted him up so that he should see better above the crowd. Finally:

"Tsarles want lion!" He turned on Zina the glance of his bright shallow blue eyes that were so like his father's. Those eyes—and Zina's hair! Often she wondered why he wasn't pretty—but there was a solidness about him; his expression was vigorous and observant, but unchangeable; he was as consistently sure of himself as of what he wanted, and only roused from his solidity by a thwarting of his wishes. He was healthy, he was what the patent-food advertisements call "bonnie," he was sweet-smelling and self-willed, but he wasn't, Zina resented and yet somehow blamed herself for it, a "charming" baby.

"Tsarles want lion!" he repeated.

"No, Charles."

He turned to his grandmother—as someone more instinctively ready to give him what he wanted.

"*Tiny* lion, Grannie?"

Cynthia laughed and pushed back the ruddy fringe under his purple linen hat.

"No, Charles, you can't have even a tiny lion!"

He accepted her decision, but his enthusiasm for lions perceptibly waned. He looked round the crowd.

"Tsarles look-see more?" ("Look-see" was Charles' special and emphatic verb.)

They took him out.

"We might try *sea*-lions now," Zina suggested. Cynthia put up her parasol; Charles watched the folds of grey silk stretched out and out and grow to a rigid pale grey dome held above his grandmother's head: the edges of the dome made him think of a picture of bats' wings in a poetry book he had. Trotting between his mother and grandmother over the yellow gravel walks, he felt them as very

tall. His mother's gloved hand carrying a bag like an envelope of scarlet leather, was level with his head, and he had to look upward to see the little gold pencil and seal that hung on a chain from round his grandmother's neck and made a minute ticking ringing sound.

The sea-lions were utterly new to him. They dived from the rocks, they disappeared under the water and rose breathing and making fog-horn noises and vociferously clearing their throats and nasal passages: they flippered weightily out of the water and dragged their immense dark glistening bodies up the rocks, their heads and the forward half of their bodies swaying to and fro. The amiability of their expression never altered. To Zina their expression suggested the very kindest and most devoted of old housekeepers. But to her son only the whiskers were a clue:

"Pussies!" he said—and his grandmother began to laugh helplessly.

A sea-lion dived and disappeared.

"Poor pussy fallen in," he stated.

The monkeys pleased him. Zina bought him a bag of nuts which he pressed in one by one through the bars. He tried to eat one himself but it was taken away. He was particularly attracted by the small grey monkeys who climbed up ladders and had a trapeze. (He would have liked his nursery to be like that.) When one of them fell backwards off the trapeze and chattered with chagrin, Charles was amused.

"Monkee! Monkee! Do it again," he requested. But the small creature merely stared at him with sad resentful eyes and rubbed its behind with a skinny paw.

Zina improved the occasion. "Your great, great—*ever* so great grandfather and grandmother were monkeys—like that," she said gravely.

Charles turned and regarded Cynthia from top to toe and then fixed his shallow azure eyes on the monkey and then once more on Cynthia. (It struck him incidentally that Grannie was laughing again.) He made no comment, but it was obvious that he doubted whether his mother had spoken the truth.

The zebras and giraffes and eagles fulfilled his expecta-

tions. They were just like the pictures. The tortoises bored him; the snakes filled him with unreasoning fear, so that he demanded, with his second breath of the reptile house, to be taken out.

Cynthia looked at her watch.

"What about a ride on an elephant?"

Whatever ecstasy lurked in Charles' phlegmatic composition came to the surface. He tightened his grip on Zina's hand.

"Nelliphant—Grannie. . . . Tsarles want to ride on a nelliphant!"

"Very well, Mummie—I'll take him."

It struck Zina that it was always her mother or Wendy or Nannie who thought of things that Charles would like. Not that he was a difficult or fastidious child to please; but she didn't herself, ever get into any real sympathy with him: she liked to dress him: often she liked to have him about the house: she was glad, in a mild way, that the child should so gratify and delight George. But she didn't, she knew—and the knowledge cheapened her in her own sight—love him as—as you did—should—love your own child. Neither his laughter nor his tears could hurt her. It only hurt her that she couldn't love him wonderfully and intimately and painfully as she might have done.

Charles climbed up with her on to that delightful and impressive mountain that was the "nelliphant." The saddle supported two long seats joined back to back. Charles sat closely beside his mother, and, stifled with a sense of elevation which became pride as he felt more assured of safety, he stared down on his grandmother, who smiled up from under the parasol—which from this height suggested her peeping out from under a very elegant mushroom. The elephant moved off—a movement like a gently regulated earthquake. It moved along the avenue of trees which, at this height, lost their grandeur and might have been so much parsley. Charles sat silent, at first pink-cheeked and tense.

Two minutes later Zina felt him shift at her side; he looked a little pale.

"Tsarles get down now."

"You can't, darling—until we get back to the stand."

Charles' voice was anxious. "Tsarles get down," he insisted.

"But you *can't*. . . ."

A minute later—it was very, *very* dreadful—Charles was sick.

Cynthia and Zina took him back to the flat. All the way back in the taxi his round face was sad and pale. Only once his languid look brightened—as they passed the Horse Guards in Whitehallie. Nannie, who was looking after him while he was in London and his own nurse was on a holiday, sometimes took him to see the Guards changed.

He recovered, after the manner of his age, once he was back at the flat and was disposed for his tea.

When Edgar came in Charles told him that the "nelliphant" had been naughty.

Edgar built for his grandson several brick towers on the carpet which the latter knocked down.

Zina watched her father and her son crawling about together on the floor—she never wanted to play with Charles. She turned to her mother who was beside her on the sofa.

"I must lack the maternal instinct, Mummie——" She said it casually, taking up an illustrated paper. She wanted her mother somehow to make an excuse for her, for she despised herself: she was hard—she had made herself hard—sold her own sensibilities—and she was ashamed.

Cynthia glanced at her and then at Charles.

"It isn't quite that—is it, Zina?" she said gently: and Zina took what was behind the sentence—the judgment and the sympathy, in silence.

Edgar broke in, topping a tower of seven bricks with yet another.

"What does George think of his chances in the constituency?"

"Oh—I think he's fairly satisfied. Chelshire's extraordinarily Tory, except for one or two small industrial villages."

"What did you say the name of the Independent Liberal is, who's member now?"

"Peter Holmes." Zina added after a pause: "He was at Oxford with Colin—I never met him—but I heard of him often."

Edgar glanced up at her: she was turning over the pages of her paper.

"They'll have a straight fight down there then——?"

Zina nodded. "If they don't put up a Labour man at the last minute—Holmes means to contest it again. He's got a certain amount of personal popularity of course——"

Charles interrupted a conversation droning boringly above his head.

"Ganpa, do it *again!*"

Edgar perforce returned to his task.

Nannie appeared in the doorway.

"Now Charles——"

She bore him off and Zina followed. She would have liked Nannie to feel that she wanted to see him "put to bed."

Cynthia turned to her husband.

"It's so terrible—how little she cares for that baby!"

"She would like to."

"Not really. She doesn't want to care for anyone." Cynthia was nervous—unhappy.

"Poor Zina!"

"Poor baby!"

"I don't think he minds or misses anything. He is not a very sensitive or imaginative child—one can see that even now. It he *had* been he might have woken her—made her *feel* again—*really* feel!"

"She's become—in a way—static, in character and feelings. She hasn't grown. Nothing in her life seems really to touch her—either in pleasing or hurting her."

Edgar assented. "You're right, Cyntia; she has stopped growing, stopped feeling—and that is not 'living!'"

"She stopped herself. She needn't have. It's a kind of mild living death for her, Hans!"

"Because she was weak."

Cynthia laid her hand on her husband's arm.

"Hans—d'you—d'you think we were—we're right—in not telling her that Colin's alive?"

Edgar got up and began to walk about, his heavy shoulders bent.

"How could it do anything but *harm*, Cyntia? She is married, and he is now resigned to the knowledge that she is married—she has made her life——"

Cynthia spoke bitterly. "And what a life! It seems to me she's broken *both* their lives, hers and Colin's——"

"It wasn't quite her—in the beginning."

"Fate—and then her, if you like!—her character!"

He queried restlessly, painfully, feeling that now she was somehow seeing more clearly.

"What good could our telling her do, Cyntia?"

Cynthia met her husband's look with a strange directness.

"Make her *alive* again, Hans—make her grow and feel again!"

He muttered: "You may be right, my darling—you may be——" and then practicalities ranged themselves, smug and simpering, to his vision. "But George?" he added: "her position—her child——"

And again Cynthia gave him that strange direct look, and said, what she wouldn't (the Cynthia of other easy days) ever have said:

"Those things matter, Hans—very much—but what matters most is 'living'—being alive to the smallest nerve and to the very depths of one's power of knowing and feeling, that's surely the greatest obligation of all."

And now he realised, with a deep amazed humility, how she, at least, had grown.

Still he hedged.

"I had a short letter from Colin lately. He may soon be back in England, only he means to go away again on another job. He asked me *not* to tell her."

"It's Colin's position," she mused, "that's the more difficult. I don't mean I see any clear solution—for them. I only mean Zina ought to *know*. Sparing her is like keeping her chloroformed!"

"But what would she *do?*"

"That wouldn't be for us to foresee or influence—her life——"

"I cannot tell her, until I've told Colin that I'm going to, since I told him I would *not* do so."

"Tell him then."

"I don't know where he is. He has left Vienna and is journeying back to England through Europe."

"I agree you must wait until you've told him. But then—I've thought it all over so deeply and carefully, Hans, night after night—then she *must* know."

"Even if it should mean a wreck?"

"Could there be more wreckage than *now*, Hans?"

Edgar paced to the window and gazed out unseeingly into the discreet courtyard below.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know."

XVII

The Election was flung over the country—caught the public in its toils, involving in its knotted mesh not merely such fish as were, so to speak "preserved," politicians and all their inevitable vituperative little satellites (tub-thumpers, journalists, agents, local committees), but such innocent fry as ladies who could lend their barns or gardens, schoolmasters who could lend halls, men and women, youths and girls and even children who could canvass or drop leaflets in their spare moments; factories where scarlet and blue rosettes were made, printing presses habitually devoted to announcements of a "Flannel Dance" or "Whist Drive" or "Garden Party". A hundred simple creatures and institutions struggled, perhaps writhed a little and succumbed to the general entanglement. Over the countryside the fall of the leaves was replaced by hoardings "yellow and black and pale and mystic red," which shot up in fevered luxuriance; maniacal behaviour, raucous shouting and slanderous imputations were accepted as normal at street corners and in village halls. A certain amount of idealism, a certain amount of petty dishonesty went on unremarked in the turmoil and hubbub—so that mild people returning from political meetings had perhaps a doubt as to whether Democracy were really a thing worth the cost at which the world had been "made safe"—and a second query demanded just *how* safe, anyway, it *had* been made.

The election, it seemed to Zina, assembled in Chelshire, far more "family" than the occasion of her wedding or Charles' christening two and a half years before. Added to Wendy and old Mr. and Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson, Charles and his nurse (Charles was insisted upon by George's agent as a draw) were innumerable cousins and aunts of George's (with cars) and relations of Zina's who crowded to West Chelshire apparently actuated by the double conviction that blood was thicker than water and Conservatism preferable to less "solid" political creeds. The entire contingent, its permanent bulk and its spasmodic cohorts of motorists, was lodged in Casterbury, the chief town of the Division. The White Hart Hotel, became the scene of the incessant coming and going of speakers and agents and canvassers, of cars and telegraph boys, of flurried young men and consciously important women who hastened in and out from the Committee Rooms further down the High Street.

Everyone was supremely busy and significant, even to Charles, who was driven round the constituency shouting "'Vote for Daddy," or paraded up and down the Casterbury streets, round the market square and in and out of the shops decked by his nurse in a scarlet hat—the Conservative colour.

George's verbosity increased with the pressure of the campaign. He didn't seem content with addressing innumerable meetings, plunging into interminable impromptu talks and conferences with his supporters; his rhetoric didn't cease during his absences from platform and committee, but abounded at meals, to his family and whomever was present; he couldn't tell enough people sufficiently often what he believed, or cease to emphasise, even while he dressed in the morning, his sentiments with regard to Bolshevism. He was verbosely and incessantly righteous.

But as polling day approached Zina knew that behind all his bluff and arrogance he was anxious—that the result was more important to him, held his ambition more completely, than any event in his life since his wound had compelled him to give up tennis. He was profoundly anxious and as profoundly determined not to show any anxiety—since

he had strong feelings on keeping up the *morale* of his supporters. He knew that Holmes had a large personal following, and the canvas returns so far showed only a small margin of allegiance in the Conservative favour.

Old Barrett-Saunderson enjoyed himself vastly, haranguing the farmers and telling labourers' wives to ask his wife, who was strained and tongue-tied at his side, what *she* thought of Free Trade. "A lot of bunkum," old Barrett-Saunderson pronounced it, while his wife fumbled with the conviction which he had, as it were, flung at her to dangle and make sparkle before cottage doors.

Cynthia came down for a few days to help Zina. (Edgar was unable to get away from the business and she wouldn't leave him for long.) Cynthia was a success at meetings, where a quality of sympathy in her voice and gracious looks caught the hearts of her audiences. They didn't mind particularly what she said, but they began, in a space of three minutes, to love her. As a canvasser she was less efficient, since she was apt to form swift and heartfelt friendships with the women who had come, at first with the justifiable resentment of the invaded, to their doors, and became so rapt in the sharing of their confidences and the admiration of their children, that she would forget to proceed with her political campaign. On one occasion she and Zina had gone together to canvass a village up on the hills above Casterbury. After "doing" a group of cottages on her own Zina looked round for her mother and searched for her up the main street, puzzled at her disappearance. Finally, she heard a sweet familiar laugh—and traced it to its source—Cynthia sitting in a kitchen crowded with pots and chairs and children and hens, playing with the youngest baby while the mother made tea and confided a medley of gossip to her visitor.

Wendy, in her first term at Oxford, had demanded ten days' absence to help her brother-in-law. Wendy worked hard, dashed about in a two-seater, and in breathless intervals mocked the whole "show." She was amused—and a little scornful in her first intimate experience of an election. "So much righteous exaggeration," she said. But she admired Zina's hard steady work, for it was so obvious that she essentially didn't care—wasn't stirred

either by the political or personal cause, and a casual remark revealed to Wendy something further.

"It's awfully queer, Wendy—fighting against a man who knew Colin so well—it almost feels—treacherous——"

And Wendy had dismissed the idea with:

"That's silly, Zina—besides, one has to pretend 'heart and soul fighting'—especially in your position. I don't envy you your task of perpetual and visible brightness."

"I shall be glad when it's all over."

Their talk accompanied a waiting about in the hall of the White Hart, to set out for a series of evening meetings.

"How much chance"—Wendy instinctively lowered her voice—"d'you think George really has?"

"A reasonable one, I think. . . . He'd be absolutely cut up if he were beaten."

"I didn't know he cared *so* much."

"More than anything now. It's gripped him extraordinarily. And of course he's always had this idea of being a natural leader of men—ruling classes—and so forth. I absolutely *dread* the idea of his failing. You see I'm nothing—for him to fall back on, as some wives might be for some men."

"But. . . . Charles. . . . He adores Charles."

"Yes, but that all goes together in George's mind: governing and sons."

"George's mind." Zina turned to look where George's physical self appeared at the top of the stairs. This broad-shouldered man in a big motoring-coat. One never escaped the *bodies* of people, the looks of people. One said "Where is So and So . . . ?" meaning "Where is their body?" One didn't ask, didn't even try to know where someone's mind was, and yet that was what counted for one—always. "What's So and So *doing* this morning?" never "What is So and So *thinking* this morning"—always physical selves, acts, destinies. . . . All this physicalness that kept one essentially in entity, apart, one*self*—made for all the wrongs and distortions in *knowing* people. And yet one didn't . . . one so seldom troubled—about minds, or met in the great sensitive ebb and flow of thought. . . .

George stood in the hall, impatient and dictatorial, telling people to do things, arrange things. Finally:

"We'd better be off. . . . Got your coat, darling? Come along, father. Wendy, you'd better sit in front."

. . . . . .

Peter Holmes was pacing his committee rooms. His agent, seated at the central table, was undoing a new parcel of pamphlets. He eyed the type critically:

"Those ought to go well."

"*Hope* so. How d'you think we're doing on the *other* side of the division?"

"Pretty well, I think, Mr. Holmes . . . the big enthusiasm won't come till the last three days, though. You remember last time?" The little man put the bundle on one side.

"Yes. By the way, I had quite good meetings over at Westbury last night. They don't like Barrett-Saunderson up there much—they're rather Free Trade, and he's roaring pure Protection at every meeting."

"He's got a lot of meetings up in the hill district this evening—his wife's billed to speak, too."

" . . . Oh, yes—I've seen her once or twice . . . rather a lovely woman."

The agent put his sharp, bird-like head on one side.

"He scores with the *women's* votes—having that child down here."

Holmes half smiled.

"Sorry I can't supply that, Jenkins."

The agent laughed nervously and changed the subject.

"We need a meeting or two in the direction of Churston Hollow. They're sleepy down that way—inclined not to vote at all."

"Well, I've got another pretty good speaker coming down late to-morrow afternoon to help me—a man called Russell—we might send him there."

"Very good, Mr. Holmes."

"You'll have to post him up as to the trend of the campaign down here. He's only just back from abroad, I met him by chance in the Club last week and he offered to help. Have you got a time table?"

The Agent hastened to produce one from a cupboard.

"Thanks very much," Holmes glanced down the London-Casterbury list. "Yes—he only gets in 5.43—so I shall send him straight along here. You can give him a few facts and we'll send him off to wake up Churston Hollow."

"Very good, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes looked at his watch:

"I must go off to the Town Hall. I shall be in after the meeting to tell you how it's gone."

"Very good, Mr. Holmes."

XVIII

The following evening the agent was alternately pecking at a cup of tea and a heap of canvass cards. He had had a flurried day—people in and out and in and out . . . his little drab meals were always delayed. He looked up absently when the door opened—a young man he didn't know. . . . Then he recollected: of course, this must be Mr. Holmes' friend. The smile was disarming, gentle and friendly.

"I hope I haven't come to the wrong committee rooms—my name is Russell."

"Oh no, oh no . . . not at all. The Conservative rooms are the other side of the market square—just in the High Street."

Colin entered and shut the door.

"Holmes said you would prime me with facts and send me out to speak." He laughed and put down his despatch case on a chair.

The agent begged the latest supporter to be seated—proceeded to explain. He bombarded Colin with brief, anxious sentences; led him to a map of the division which hung on the wall:

"Down *there—very* Conservative, I'm afraid. That part is better. This is where you are to go to-night. Here is a copy of the election address, and these may help you."

Colin was loaded with white and blue manifestoes, some with photographs of Holmes, looking aggressively calm and noble. Peter had changed amazingly little since Oxford, Colin thought. Odd luck, meeting him in the club.

Colin declined any more pamphlets.

"That'll be enough really, I think—with all the information you've so kindly given me."

The agent visibly squared his small person in his determination to be, despite all obstacles, complacent:

"Now we must arrange for you to *get* there." He hesitated. "I suppose . . . it really *is* awkward, Mr. Russell, but we have so few people to drive cars . . . compared to the other side. We *have* a Ford free. . . ."

"I can drive it—if that's the bother. I can easily find my way——" He strolled back to the map on the wall. "Churston Hollow seems to be on a main road."

"Yes. Yes it is. If you *could*. . . ." The little man's tone was incredibly relieved. Another complication solved.

"Of course I can!"

The Ford bounced along what the map had optimistically represented as a main road. Driving was difficult on account of the rain which blurred the wind screen—so that Colin was mostly conscious of advancing perpetually into the wet mist of his own headlights.

The Ford rattled unpleasantly as it mounted from the hollow of the town toward the uplands. The rain drove in from the side under the hood. Colin blinked the drops off his lashes, shoved up his collar and peered forward. A bicycle, flashing one yellow eye, whirled and hissed past him down the hill. At intervals one or two figures, plodding by the roadside, were lit up by the headlights, and vanished again. Now Colin could feel himself once more on a level road: the air on the uplands was keener, and a wind blew the rain more vigorously in on him out of the darkness. The puddles came up at his approach like broad streaks of light. The steering wheel shivered and jerked under his hand.

There was an endlessness, a timelessness, about this staggering through wet chiaroscuro. It seemed incredible that a fortnight ago—a week ago—Provence had been beautiful for him—vivid with red and tawny vine leaves and hot, white roads and violet-blue mountains (the chrome and gold roofs of Avignon asleep in the sun! The glinting

depths of green pools in the mountain rivers—the sapphire glitter of the Mediterranean across the flats of the Camargue . . . !)

A bang and a sudden lurch of the car recalled him. A puncture. He ran the car to the side of the road and got out. He stepped ankle deep into a puddle and swore. There was no spare wheel. There were apparently no tools, and anyway no possible light by which to achieve a repair. Colin groped round the tyre—perfectly flat—and he hadn't a notion of his locality or even of how far now his destination might be. He tried, despite a dripping ankle and a permeation of rain through his collar, to deduce any humour from his situation, but if there lurked any humour his peculiar sense thereof was dormant. He gazed at the mass of clumsy vehicle, and supposed that he must proceed with even less smoothness than before.

A faint whizzing sounded in the distance along the road. He peered in its direction. A faint glow of headlights coming nearer—a small car! Colin stood in deliberate despair in the middle of the road. The car drew near, slowed down.

"Breakdown?" enquired a voice from somewhere behind the headlights.

"I'm afraid so—bad puncture!"

The voice seemed to be getting out of its car:

"I've got a spare wheel, I imagine."

The voice had a lazy inflection—a girl's voice.

"I should be most frightfully grateful if you *could* help me."

He stepped forward. He could discern her now, a girl bending over the spare wheel strapped to the side of her car.

"I'm in rather a tiresome position—I've got to find a meeting and speak at it—and I don't know the countryside."

"How . . . comic!" said the voice, with an odd, mystified inflection. "How . . . comic," she repeated and stood up to look at the victim of such a situation. The flood of light was in Colin's eyes, he could just discern her as slim and rather tall . . . but suddenly, it seemed to him, there was, as she looked at him, a fantastic rigidity

in her attitude . . . then he was startled by her stifled cry.

"What's the matter? Have you hurt yourself?"

She stumbled forward into the semicircle of radiance—staring at him with what seemed to him an insane intensity—and suddenly choked:

"C . . . C . . . Colin. . . ."

His heart seemed to stop. He said confusedly:

"I don't understand . . . who are you?" He knew he didn't know her—he could see her face—just her cheek and jaw lit up from one side.

Her hand groped toward him.

"Colin. . . . You . . . you aren't. . . . Colin, you're alive?"

He heard his own voice break control and gibber:

"*Who* are you? *Who* are you? Who *are* you?"

"Wendy . . ." she stammered. "Oh, please, if you're real hold my hand or I shall faint or be sick or something idiotic."

He took her by the shoulders, wrenched her round to face the glare.

"Ye-e-es, I see now!" he added with an absurd, desperate inconsequence. "You were so . . . so fat . . . the sausage!" he said unsteadily, and tried to laugh. The grip of her hand tightened in his.

"Colin . . . you are . . . quite real?"

"Yes."

"How? . . . I mean . . . I believed—we all did . . . Colin?"

"Your father knew. . . ."

The rain poured between them.

"*Daddy knew!* When? How?"

"I . . . I was taken prisoner, lost my memory (shell-shock), you know . . ." He paused, choked for a second. It was so incredible. Wendy—Wendy here! Wendy, grown up, hardly recognisable, here on the hills with him in the dark, drenching night. He went on: "Finally . . . in January, after the Armistice, my memory, the part that had stopped, sort of clicked back—I was in a hospital in Paris. I wired to Zina."

"To . . . Zina!"

"Your father got the wire apparently—as—as Zina was already married—and away. He came to Paris and told me this."

"That Zina was married! Oh, Colin."

"I was rather knocked out for a time, and stayed in Paris. I came back to England for a rest. Then your father got me a journalist's job—out in Vienna. I was there until the summer. Since then I've been travelling. I meant to go and see your father when I got back last week, but I haven't had time yet."

His words came to her with a restrained vibration.

"But *why—why* not *tell* us, Colin? Why didn't daddy tell us? Does mummie know?"

"I think so."

She was bemused, resentful, shaken by the situation; but her manner was steady, almost frigid now.

"Why should they have *kept* it from us . . . from Zina. Oh, Colin, when she thought. . . . "

"I didn't want her to know—for both our sakes——"

"But why? Why? *Why?*"

"It would only have upset her, made her unhappy, spoilt her happiness."

"You fool," Wendy said abruptly. . . . "I shall tell her *now*—in twenty minutes—immediately."

"*Now*—tell her? Tell Zina? But *where*, Wendy?"

She started back, still gazing at him.

"D'you mean to say—that you don't know Zina's down here? That that isn't really—*why* you've come?"

He was utterly at a loss.

"Why should she be? I don't——"

Wendy's control rocked between laughter and tears:

"But, Colin . . . don't you *know* that George—Barrett-Saunderson—is the Tory man here . . . if you're fighting him?"

"Of course I know. But what's that got to do. . . ."

". . . But . . . Zina's his wife."

"*His?* . . . But he's . . . he's got one."

"He divorced her—early in the war."

"Barrett-Saunderson. . . . *God!*"

"But didn't daddy *tell* you that?"

"No. We didn't discuss—Zina."

"But what else was there for you to discuss? You saw daddy several times apparently."

"Only twice——"

"All the same—what else could you *want* to discuss?"

"Under the circumstances. . . . "

"But you didn't *know* the circumstances!"

"I knew she was married."

"But, Colin—all the *same*, didn't you want to know, to *see* her again?"

She was incredulous: this inexplicable restraint!

"Didn't you *care* any more?" she added. She was frightened when he answered, by the pain in his voice.

"Care," he repeated. . . . "*I* cared. . . . "

Wendy spoke gently now.

"Sorry, Colin. You mean, you believed Zina didn't?"

He leant against one of the front mudguards of the car.

"I know she did, in a way. Besides, anyway, she was married."

"*Married!*" Wendy dismissed that as secondary.

He went on, forgetting Wendy for the moment:

"It was natural, at her age—and under the circumstances—to fall in love again."

A couple of bicycles swished past on the road. Wendy watched the ruby backlights disappear unsteadily into blackness.

"Fall in love," Wendy repeated, and added in a whisper: "You incredible fools—both of you——" She came up to Colin and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Colin!"

He could feel a strength of purpose in her now; she had an idea, she meant to *do* something: her gaze was clear and searching:

"Colin, dear!"

"Yes—Wendy?"

"You must come *now* with me."

"*Come?*"

"Yes. To Zina, Colin, and clear up all this beastly sentimental, impossible muddle!"

"But I *can't!*" He turned with a kind of futility toward his Ford. "My meeting. . . . "

"That must be over long ago. Anyway—your *meeting!*"

He couldn't think, couldn't grasp and face it all so suddenly; whether he should "run away"—or go with her; and if he went what he should say, do—what he *ought* to say and do?

"But, Wendy. . . . "

Wendy's light grasp was firmer on his arm.

"Colin—this—matters. You must come. This is—Zina's life and yours, my dear."

She was strangely calm now; she was conscious that among all her doubts and scepticisms she did at least believe, and could, therefore, fight, for this one thing: the absolute rightness, above all other considerations, of people loving each other. The consciousness of the belief had flashed on her too suddenly and overwhelmingly for her to realise yet any qualifications and degrees of its truth: she merely knew it as right, in a way she knew no other "rightness." It was so luminous to her: Colin was alive and Zina was alive, and they loved each other. Therefore, they must be together. Everything else, conventions, small rights and wrongs, and possibilities and impossibilities, scuttered away to an outer darkness.

And Colin was afraid: of himself, of what he wanted and what he believed. He was afraid of Wendy's unquestioning sweeping away of all obstacles; of the radiant, ludicrous simplicity of her conviction—which made her take his hand and drag him, hesitating, toward the door of her car—to say with an ecstatic matter-of-factness:

"We'll go straight back to Casterbury now and find her. She's in this evening—and George is out, doing a quantity of meetings——"

"But, Wendy——" The beating of his heart made a heavy thudding rhythm through his dazed, burning sensations. His mouth was hot and stiff.

" . . . But Wendy. . . . "

She got in—fumbled about for the self-starter.

"We can send a man out from Casterbury to look after that derelict bus of yours. Come on, Colin, get in here."

Her command was so lucid, so compelling in its manner of dominating all the grotesque impacts of their meeting, subduing them to the past, resolving them by the strength of what she presented as the only and inevitable course.

And he didn't know, couldn't even mentally pause and judge, this course—with this ecstasy (of pain? of unbearable happiness?) dragging at his nerves and senses.

"Get in," she repeated.

He obeyed; and a silence held them both as they drove back to Casterbury.

XIX

Zina was alone in the "Lounge" of the White Hart. She sat by the fire and contemplated going to bed, for she was tired after canvassing all day.

She heard the sound of a car drawing up in the street below. That couldn't be George back early, after all. She yawned.

Some one was arriving in the hall; she could hear voices. Hoped it wasn't any tiresome committee people wanting to speak to her—expecting her to *mind* so much: to be as hectic and busied as themselves. . . .

"Zina!"

Wendy's voice. Only Wendy back.

"In here!"

Wendy came in and slammed the door behind her.

Zina glanced at her—and then stared.

"What on earth's the matter?"

Wendy was breathing as though she'd been running against a fierce wind.

"Zina—listen to me—I'm going to tell you something. You mustn't be frightened. It's wonderful. But you—mustn't be afraid, my dear."

Wendy came and knelt by her sister's chair and searched Zina's puzzled expression.

"Zina. You won't be afraid—you mustn't be."

Zina said, nervously now, "What is it, Wendy? Everything's all right, isn't it? Daddy?—and mummie?"

"Oh, God, yes!" Wendy ran her hand down Zina's forearm and seized her wrist.

"Zina—it's so *damnably* difficult to tell you. I don't want to frighten you. I want you to—believe me; it's so —so *wonderful*, Zina! Zina—Colin's alive——"

Zina sat upright, staring blankly.

"I don't understand you."

"Colin's all right—Zina, he was only 'missing.' It was all a mistake. He's alive—I met him—to-night!"

"Don't be so *stupid*, Wendy." Zina was icy and afraid.

"Darling—I'm not, I'm *not*. It's true. He's alive, Zina."

Suddenly Zina crumpled forward and buried her face on her knees. Wendy caught the stifled words:

"I'm frightened. Don't *hurt* me, Wendy. Don't *hurt* me!"

Wendy laid her arm across the bent shoulders.

"It's true, my dear," she whispered. She was white to the lips; she had an awful sense of responsibility, of the need of pushing all this through—making it right.

"Zina—Zina, dear," she murmured gently.

Zina lifted her head.

"True?" She repeated in dull, strange wonder. "True? That Colin—that Colin's alive?" Her voice cracked oddly.

"He's *here*, Zina, he's out in the hall. He's waiting—to see you."

"To—see—me?" Still the dull, strange tone. "Colin?" —and then she cried sharply: "Don't, *don't hurt* me so, Wendy!"

Zina turned now to meet her sister's look, and Wendy saw that she was afraid.

"It was all a mistake, Zina! He was only a prisoner, lost his memory—it came back afterwards—daddy knew —but you—you were married. It was all a mistake."

Wendy's words, impetuous and consoling, were like salt on a raw wound.

"A mistake," she echoed through parched lips, and heard her own laugh shoot up like a rocket and fall in sparks of terror. She got up swiftly and stood regarding Wendy tensely, her lovely eyes dilated.

"Wendy . . ." she implored—as though Wendy could save her from, she didn't quite know—what.

Wendy returned to the door.

"I shall send him in." She didn't look at Zina again and went out. "Go in, Colin," she whispered—and suddenly it was all too fantastic and funny and like "scherades." And she shut the door after him—and groped her way to her room, sobbing hysterically. She hadn't cried since the day that she was told that John had been killed—five years ago.

. . . . .

For the first moment they couldn't, Zina and Colin, either speak or move. It was as though the air had crystallised and held them on opposite sides of the room.

They looked at one another, and as they looked the quiet of the room became filled for them with what was unspeakable and almost unbearable. They became, in the breathless, quivering atmosphere, conscious of one another by a sense remote from the mere senses of sight and touch; their awareness of physical appearance was subdued and made inconsequent by some spiritual comprehension of one another—a spiritual groping to what they were conscious of as their real selves.

Zina's mind thudded, "This is Colin—this is Colin," but she wasn't sure if he had been killed or not.

And Colin fumbled in his desire to establish a continuity of his sense of Zina, *this* Zina, with his vital remembrance of the girl Zina he had left in the drawing-room at Lowndes Street.

Then a panic rose between them, like a typhoon out of their silence. Colin's mind, struggling to the surface of the situation, attempted to co-ordinate all the manner and attitude that he had dizzily formulated for himself driving back beside Wendy in the car.

"Do you mind—Zina?"

She flinched when he spoke. She hadn't believed he would speak. "Mind?" she repeated.

"Mind my coming to see you? Wendy seemed so sure you—wouldn't."

She frowned and put her hand to her brow, as though her head ached violently.

"Come here," she whispered.

He came slowly and mechanically to where she stood. She stretched out her hand, and fingered the stuff of his sleeve; then she recoiled.

"Colin!"

He looked and looked at her now; her presence began to steal about him like a moonlit mist. He lost his first vivid, spiritual consciousness of her. The mist was sweet and strange—he made himself speak normally:

"I hear—I didn't know—you're married to Barrett-Saunderson—I hope it isn't too late to—to say I'm glad you're—happy?"

He meant it, or as nearly as he could. But the tone of her answer twisted his equanimity.

"Happy!" She spoke as though terrified by an incredible insult. "Happy——"

He followed up swiftly and fearfully:

"*Aren't* you? Don't you love him?"

He wouldn't let himself pause to think which answer he wanted.

She shook her head and her look didn't waver from his.

"But—didn't you marry him because. . . ."

Again she shook her head.

"But why, then? Why?"

"I—I was alone—and afraid. You—you had gone. It didn't seem to matter."

For a second he was seized by a kind of horror, of how it had all happened, of the sheer haphazard of it all, of the cruelty and waste of what had come about. But his horror couldn't be of her—for now she was so real again, so unchanged, so terribly and amazingly herself that there didn't seem any question of blaming *her*. And yet he knew that he wouldn't blame her because he loved her.

"I—I couldn't help it," she cried. "I'm *like* that—Colin"—and he saw that now she was afraid of him, of his judgment; and her fear became for him lovely and irresistible—and his sense of horror was veiled in pity.

"My dear——" He made himself draw back from her. "I know you couldn't."

Now she stood shivering, without a word. And again

the mist drifted round his perceptions, blotted out harsh horizons in its shimmering obscurity; now its fantastic sweetness seemed to permeate his senses and drug his will. Her words came to him like white petals blown against his eyelids by the night wind.

"Can—you—forgive—me—Colin?"

"Zina—darling."

She saw him waver for a second, saw his pale face and greenish eyes strangely transparent, as though in a dream.

"Colin—I love you—darling."

His last resistance broke on a harsh sob:

"My dear——"

. . . . .

It was Zina who stirred the magic that held them with a sudden question, dreamily spoken:

"You'll take me away, Colin?"

Her arms were round his neck, her cheek against his.

"Yes, my dear——" And he thought, "From another man? From the marriage she chose?" Alone he couldn't have endured the realisation of what he was doing; but the circumstances of her love for him were too strong. And now that he was with her he couldn't endure the loss of her again.

"Soon, darling. George"—she felt Colin's embrace slacken, and the consciousness of what she had done began to dawn for her with a raw clarity—"George won't mind much—not really, I think. Except the publicity part——"

"Don't *you* mind that?"

"No—nothing matters except you, Colin——"

"We must see your husband——"

She hesitated. "We'd better leave it until after the result of the poll." She remembered suddenly, softened by her own painful happiness, that George had been good to her—kind and considerate.

"It would be—fairer," she added, "and if he wins," she smiled for a moment through starting facile tears, "he'll be consoled by his political life. And, anyway—there's always Charles for him——"

"Charles?"

"My—our little boy——"

He let her go roughly—stared at her.

"You never said—— I didn't know you had a child."

"Yes, Colin—but——"

There was an odd sternness in his voice (that funny streak of—of what long ago she used to explain to herself as "Puritanism").

"But, Zina—that changes it, *surely?* You can't—you can't want—to leave your child?"

He wanted her; even as he stood back he realised how almost impossible it would be for him now to face an existence without her. And yet he wanted her (against that deeper spiritual comprehension that he had of her essential value and values) to feel it impossible that she could leave her child even for him.

"But, Colin, I——" She knew it might be one more disillusionment for him—but now she must be truthful and unafraid—for both their happiness. "I don't care terribly about him—about Charles. I never feel, in a way, that he belongs to me—Colin—nothing matters"—but again she remembered George's goodness—the way she'd treated him from the beginning (exploitation!)—"Colin—I love you more than anything——"

Strangely Zina's soft, luminous words brought an echo of other tones, cool and indifferent, offering a fantastic, passionate allegiance—flames smouldering on a marble altar—— And he had only been able to think—of this—of Zina (though he hadn't believed he should ever see her again)—— And he hated himself, remembering how he had kissed Hope.

The swift flicker of shame, as he faced Zina, melted his reserve, his sudden judgment. If she *didn't* love the child. Stupid to be conventional—for *that*. But the idea of her leaving the little boy hurt him. Wouldn't the child want her?

"But, Zina, darling, think; *think* what it all means to you, darling." Another thought came to him as a swift reproach. "And, Zina—I'm not—I'm not well-off as Barrett-Saunderson is—and you're used to—to luxury, my dear." He saw himself taking her away, from a smooth, warm, sheltered life, taking her from her proper status, from her husband and baby, spoiling her friendships—breaking up the ordered perfections of her life.

"Colin, as if *that* mattered."

He must, he knew, reason with her, make her see it all clearly. This was only fair—not to let them both be swept away—so that she shouldn't wake up to realisation and regret, to find his love for her wasn't enough compensation.

"Zina, you must think. Think out clearly what it's all going to mean to you, to your family, to the course of your whole life." He fought against what he wanted, looking straight at her and yet avoiding the appeal of her look. "It's because I love you and because I know you so well, Zina, that it's—it's my responsibility to make you think, to stop you breaking up your life on impulse like this——" He checked her protest. "Dearest, try and see just how little I've got to give you. Your husband's got a career, an adequate income, and safety and reputation. And I haven't any of these things. My life's all haphazard. If you come to me it would be starting afresh—and yet without all the first freshness of being quite young and at the beginning." He added with a painful bitterness: "Zina, you mustn't make me spoil your life."

She might not have heard him.

"Colin—I love you——"

He made himself turn from her.

"You know I'm trying to be a little steady—for us both."

She was baffled by his sternness: again she was "up against" that element which she couldn't, though it was perhaps essentially what she had always most deeply loved in him, understand or reconcile with her own outlook.

"But there isn't any *question* to me—any more——"

"I must make you think it over."

"It isn't a matter of thinking—I *know*, my dear."

"It isn't fair to you, though—until you've been alone for a time—until we've been away from each other——"

"How long, then." She was half laughing, half in tears. "How long must I 'think'?"

"You say, anyway, you wouldn't speak to your husband until after the poll—that's in three days. I shall go away to-morrow, back to London. Poor Holmes will think me

rather useless—but we can't be so nearly in the same place——"

"Holmes?"

"Didn't Wendy tell you. It *is* rather humorous—I came down to help him against your husband."

"*God*, how—comic!"

"Isn't it?" said Colin abruptly, and continued, still looking away from her, "then you can think it over clearly—by yourself. Talk it over with your father—with your people, if you like. I'm not going to write to you. You must try and see the whole situation, the whole future. You mustn't think of *me*—or pretend that I in the least influence your decision, or that I should be ruined if you decide not to cut adrift with me. I shouldn't be. You must think of yourself, of *your* future; of your—child's future. You must try and see beyond impulse and emotional reaction, and realise things as they are, without letting the glamour of—of the past that belongs to us, or the—the amazingness of 'just now,' prejudice your judgment. When you've decided and thought it all over you can let me know—at Lowndes Street. And if you decide to stay—with your husband, I shall follow up my original plan and get a job abroad of some kind."

But Zina was watching his averted head—the curve of his brow and cheek, the strangely familiar delicate line of the jaw.

She said fearfully: "Colin—why have you changed suddenly like this? Darling, don't you love me, after all?"

He turned on her swiftly:

"You fool, Zina." The harshness of his tone died to a caress—but he stood aloof from her.

"I'm going now."

She stretched out her hand.

"Don't go—Colin——"

"I must——"

"Darling—just when I—just when you've come back again!"

"It's only fair."

"Fair?" She mocked through her tears.

"Fair to you, to your husband."
"But, darling—I love you so."
"That isn't everything—yet."
"Kiss me before you go."
"No—my dear."
"Colin—darling?"
"No—it's impossible."
Her appeal reached him on a queer little laugh.
"Just *once*, Colin?"
"Zina—be *fair*."
Her grave, sweet look held him for a second and he hesitated, half stepped towards her.
"Zina," but he checked himself. "No, my dear——" and he turned and went out.

XX

Wendy was already half asleep. She had come to bed exhausted after what seemed an interminable day: driving voters through rain to their polling stations; fetching parties of women and men from remote villages; knocking up old men drowsing over their firesides; urging wives to bring their husbands and husbands to make their wives get to the polling booths and avoid the final rush before the booths shut at seven o'clock. Since the early morning she had been driving the two-seater adorned with scarlet ribands over the rain-sodden Chelshire roads, down lanes and through the mazes of narrow streets in the town. At two minutes to seven she had deposited her final load, two rheumatic old ladies and their nephew, who "worked on the railway," in the lobby of the Town Hall, where half a dozen workmen were pushing their way in after being deposited by a blue-ribboned car. Wendy had caught sight of Peter Holmes in the lobby. He appeared, in contrast to George's increasingly tense verbosity, extraordinarily, almost negligently, calm.

There were a myriad things that Wendy, resisting the tides of sleep, was trying to think of, to arrange in her mind. For the last three days it had been "election"—always votes and possibilities, canvassing, meetings—these things were so thickly in the air and still buzzed so insistently in her mind that they obscured those "other

things" that she was trying to perceive. . . . Zina had been strange, ecstatic at first, yet reticent. She had said Colin had gone away, for the time being . . . until the election was over. . . . She looked as though she were being whirled about in a dream . . . as if she didn't really see or comprehend the tense succession of activities in which she took part. Even her speech last night at George's big final meeting had seemed to Wendy to emanate from a smiling, mechanical woman. Sometimes she looked as if she believed herself invisible. Whenever Wendy had asked a direct question Zina had looked as if she didn't quite focus her—and hadn't answered. She had merely implied that between her and Colin there was a temporary but satisfactory abeyance. She looked, at moments, too happy to be quite awake. Wendy wanted to *know*—wanted to hear exactly what had happened, what *would* happen? She couldn't make out the hesitation, the "abeyance" between them; she hoped they weren't being inept, entangling their future in half-hearted conventions in which they couldn't essentially believe. To Wendy, hesitation, when a course lay open and vivid, seemed sheer weakness.

There was a knock at the door. She turned on her pillow, called sleepily: "Come in!"

"It's me"—Zina's whisper.

"Come in, then."

Zina switched on the light and shut the door behind her. Her enchanted air had vanished.

"Wendy—I feel such an incredible cad."

Wendy sat up.

"Why?"

Zina sank down on the edge of the bed, wrapping her dressing-gown round herself. She was shivering.

"My dear—I'm so—terribly sorry for George."

"Why? *Suddenly?*"

"He's so awfully anxious about to-morrow, about the result. You know he's been sort of blustering all day and pretending he's perfectly confident. And then when we got in to-night, he suddenly became so—so frightfully pathetic—as soon as he was alone with me. He—he walked up and down the room for a bit and said

nothing—and then he—he came and put his head on my shoulder and said he was really so fearfully anxious about to-morrow, and that . . . that I was the only person who could comfort him. And then he talked and talked about his 'chances' (he does mind so *dreadfully*, poor darling, there's something sort of childish about his minding *so* much), and then he said, 'Well, if he *did* lose, at least there was me—and Charles, for him.' He was so *terribly* helpless and pathetic suddenly."

"That's only because his nerves are jumpy and he's fussed."

"I never felt so—sorry for him, Wendy. I've only just left him. I"—she spoke in a whimsical tone of apology—"I gave him hot milk and sat by him while he went to sleep—and he wouldn't let go of my hand. It's so odd—so *unlike* him, somehow."

"*Very*. Just nerves."

"But I didn't know he *could* ever feel he needed me, in *that* kind of way. Oh, Wendy . . . and . . . just . . . *now!*"

Wendy spoke concisely:

"You're having an orgy of sentimentality, Zina. Frankly, this doesn't make me a *bit* sorry for you. You're just getting up a pathetic drama about your love for Colin and your belated feeling about being sorry for George and having a duty towards him."

"It isn't true, Wendy don't you *realise* I'm unhappy?"

Wendy lay back, watching her sister's face. She thought, "It *suits* Zina so—to be distressful." But she said impetuously: "Silly old goose, Zina. You're not unhappy now, in the kind of dead way that made me so sorry for you before. That was different, darling. You ought to be so tremendously glad now."

"I *was* . . . "

"But, Zina—it's—it's so weak and absurd to let yourself just be unhappy about a *decision*. It's *got* to be one thing or the other. Toss up, if you *can't* decide. 'Heads, Colin; tails, George.' . . . "

"But it *is* such a big decision. It was all fairly simple until to-night. I've never *hated* George, of course; but to-night he made me feel how utterly *rotten* of me it would

be—to leave him. . . . How callous and selfish." Zina's head drooped.

Wendy was impatient.

"Zina—I *know* you, darling. You're just play-acting: feeling just a little, but sort of encouraging yourself to be worked up about all this. Zina, you *know* you are! It's so *silly* of you and such a waste of energy! You *think* you're hesitating, and 'torn between two courses.' But right inside you *know* you aren't the kind of chap who 'makes decisions' in a kind of splendid way. You just do what you want to do most."

Zina gazed before her. Half her consciousness still ached with a vague pity (for George? for herself?—for Colin?) while the other half considered intently just how far Wendy's analysis was just.

"One can change oneself," she said at last.

"Ye-es—if you truly and *really* want to. But I believe you want all the . . . the 'sob-stuff' luxury of thinking you mean to stay with George, while you'll really go back to Colin anyway!"

Zina shook her head: "I don't know——" She turned to meet Wendy's impatient, affectionate look. "I don't believe," she said slowly, "that—that if George is defeated to-morrow that, that I shall . . . be able to leave him. I should always be haunted by the feeling of how it had all—sort of toppled on to him at once. It isn't as if I'd married him for any other reason except a kind of selfishness, so that I—I owe him something."

"Zina, do be *real*. Why think of all that *now?* While there wasn't any 'decision,' and you had George with you every day, he got on your nerves, he bored you, he maddened you by his pompousness! And you were often curt and disagreeable to him."

"But, Wendy—now he's so—helpless."

"But, *Zina*, only to-night, because he's tired. He'll be just as fussy and pompous and narrow-minded again to-morrow!"

"Not if he's defeated. It'll be so awful for him."

"Oh, *sob-stuff*, Zina! Think of realities. Think of Colin. Think just whether you mean to stay with George or leave him and get him to divorce you—and marry Colin!

What's the good of being sentimental about loving and hating and right and wrong? They're much too real for that!"

"But . . . it's sort of particularly hard on George—because—because of Olive."

Wendy leant forward and took her dressing-gown which lay across the end of the bed and threw it round Zina's shoulders.

"Olive—that has its humour too. I can imagine a film called 'Runaway Wives.'"

"Don't be stupid."

Wendy said mildly: "You're losing your sense of humour, Zina. I expect it's the effect of George, though." She paused and added in a different voice: "You are *odd!*"

Zina raised her head:

"Why?"

"You suddenly rake up every obstacle—except the one that I—that most women would find hardest."

"What?"

"Charles, I mean—but you don't care for him, do you?"

"Not immensely. I suppose because he's a kind of visible symbol of my—stupid marriage."

"I don't think that explains it. I expect you haven't got a maternal complex."

Zina said with faint derision:

"I suppose all young Oxford talks Freud now!"

Wendy reverted to the issue of their talk:

"What do you think you're going to *do*, Zina?"

"Wendy—I can't leave George if—he's beaten—and sort of thrown back on me."

"My dear—you'd feel heroic and useful to him for a bit, and then you wouldn't be able to bear it, *knowing* Colin was there, and you'd want to undo your decision."

Zina piteously shook her head. But Wendy insisted:

"Listen Zina. If you decide to stay with George you're killing Colin for yourself, the second time!"

Zina started at the sense of Wendy's words.

"It isn't as if," Wendy expatiated, "I weren't sorry for George. I am, more than *you* are really—because right inside I don't believe you're thinking of anything but Colin——"

Zina rose.

"You don't understand, Wendy . . . if George loses I *must* stay."

Wendy held out a hand as if to detain her.

"That's so artificial and temporary and sentimental, Zina!"

"Perhaps. All the same——" There was obstinacy in her voice and she looked frightened by her own unhappiness.

"You might just as well toss up as *that!*" were Wendy's final words.

Zina switched off the light and went out.

XXI

Wendy stood between the old Barrett-Saundersons at the upper windows of the Conservative Committee Rooms directly opposite the wide grey façade of the Town Hall.

The square below was filled with people, packed shoulder to shoulder, the whole dingy mass of the crowd picked out in a "pointillisme" of scarlet and blue rosettes—with occasional bigger flares of those colours where a child's hat had been wound about with scarlet, or a local beauty flaunted her Liberalism by a cornflower coloured bow on her headgear. Wendy reflected that from below the Committee Rooms across to the Town Hall a fairy with a small stride could have walked easily from head to head.

Old Barrett-Saunderson took out his watch for the fifth time in two minutes.

"They say the result should be out by 12.30—and it's five and twenty to one now!" He glanced across Wendy at his wife as though she were to blame for the unpunctualities of Destiny.

"Dear . . . dear. . . . " Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson looked anxiously up at the skies and added that she was so glad—"for the people's sake" that it was no longer raining.

Charles, at another window, had discovered that if you breathe on a pane of glass it grows misty, and then you can make marks with your fingers.

"Charles goes 'Ah!'" he said to nurse, and strained sideways to breathe on another pane.

"You wait, Charles," said his nurse, "you'll see your daddy and mummie in a moment."

"Where, Nannie?"

"Over there where that balcony is and those three big windows."

"Daddy blow on the window?"

"No . . . oh no . . . Daddy'll come out through them on to the balcony." The nurse's manner was absent; she was staring across. Someone had moved inside that room opposite where "the count" was.

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson timidly touched Wendy's arm.

"There's someone . . . coming to the window!"

But the figure retreated again.

"No—no, my dear . . . a false alarm!" Old Barrett-Saunderson never hesitated to voice as his opinion even what was already common knowledge.

Wendy's sensations were gripped and merged in the sudden silence of the people below. It was now as though they scarcely breathed, but existed by a series of vibrations: their excitement ran through her like an electric current.

Old Barrett-Saunderson cleared his throat and she started as if he'd hit her. He absently scratched the back of his red neck and took out his watch again. The silence was petrifying; Wendy realised she was holding her breath. And she wondered, with a swift sense of the incredible and ludicrous, what old Barrett-Saunderson, gruffer than usual with an excitement he wouldn't show, and Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson, a little bewildered by her agitation and her knowledge of her husband's wish for its repression—what they would say if they knew her reason for so desperately desiring George's victory. . . . And she thought, "it's mad—it's impossible—Zina making a 'situation' like this. . . . Anyway she won't abide by a *contrary* run of luck . . . she isn't naturally a gambler. . . ."

Now . . . again . . . someone was moving at that central window: the crowd stirred under a powerful vibration—was rigid again. The window was being flung up . . . the man (the town clerk of course) was stepping out—on to the balcony . . . a paper in his hand.

His words fell, sharp and ringing, like pebbles into the vast bowl of silence:

"The result . . . is as follows. . . ."

The pebbles scraped the smooth, flawless depths.

"Barrett-Saunderson eleven thousand four hundred and seven. . . . "

A murmur, a swift spreading roar rose from the crowd . . . and was checked for a second by a flicker of the clerk's little hand:

" . . . Holmes eight thousand and twenty-one."

Now the roar of cheers and counter cheers rose—thicker and higher in swirling clouds of sound . . . and Wendy, gripping the windowsill, saw George and Zina appear on the balcony opposite, saw George complacently square his shoulders, and gaze down on his supporters and receive their cheers—rigidly and inevitably justified—beheld Zina standing smiling and dignified against the great breakers of sound.

Mrs. Barrett-Saunderson was clasping her grey-gloved hands and giving little chirruping cheers, while her husband boomed and roared himself scarlet. . . . And Wendy caught Charles' high imperturbable tones:

"Now Daddy can see Tsarles!——"

Now George was stepping forward—and beginning to speak; and the cheers subsiding to spasmodic murmurs.

George, magnificently triumphant, was thanking his supporters and lauding the essential rightness of Conservatism and the praiseworthy judgment of all who had voted toward the light. George, utterly satisfied with a fate which he only forbore to *say* he richly and perfectly deserved, was the very fine flower of British complacency.

Now Zina was making a speech. (And Wendy had a longing to scream with laughter—or to call down the imps of Fate to come and look and taste the situation) . . . Zina, all pale sweetness and immense radiant gratitude—so that it was conveyed to that up-gazing crowd that in electing her husband they had given her—so strange and subtle and responsive is the spirit of woman—a new life—an amazing, wonderful happiness. . . . And the final breaking tones of her voice, her lovely shimmering look, transfigured the commonplace "finale": " . . . I thank you all—from the depths of my heart."

And the cheers rose again—deafening—swelling, hurtling waves.

Then Holmes stepped out on to the balcony beside the victors. And Wendy desperately wished that *somebody* hadn't always got to be defeated.

XXII

The luncheon at the White Hart, with the crowd still cheering and surging up and down the High Street outside, was a mere noisy process to Zina.

George was at her side—and George's chief supporters were gathered round the table. The old Barrett-Saundersons—a crowd of relations—and Wendy. Wendy ate nothing and kept watching her sister.

There was champagne, and speeches, and Zina had more and more the impression that all these noisy people were indulging in some kind of triumphant memorial celebration of her wedding. The idea was . . . funny, and she laughed easily and joined in all the clamour.

George's speeches and acknowledgments of toasts came thick and fast. He spoke of Westminster with a proprietary discerning tone. Once or twice he said to Zina—his only words since the announcement of the result: "Isn't this splendid? Isn't this splendid? . . . but I *knew* we should do it!"—and looked at her as though she were someone else. He had forgotten about last night, and all her tormenting scruples were subdued, suffocated by his complacency, which had returned with fourfold aggressiveness. She could think with a certain tranquillity of his absorbing importance to himself in his new rôle. After luncheon he was to make a grand tour of the constituency. It might take, he said, until midnight, when he had been received and had spoken in every village. His opinion, that it would be too tiring for Zina, anticipated her own excuse.

After the luncheon, she hurried up to her own room and began shoving her clothes into her suitcases.

"I suppose you're going—to Colin now?" Wendy was coolly leaning in the doorway.

Zina wrapped a pair of brogues in a nightgown and pushed them in.

"I'm going to London—to daddy and mummie first." She swept brushes, bottles, boxes, pell-mell into her dressing-bag. "Shut that for me, Wendy—there's a darling."

Zina was possessed by inconsequent vitality; she laughed —glanced at herself in the glass with a little grimace of satisfaction. She was like a child going home for an unexpected holiday. Her high spirits broke out in snatches of song and funny little cooing and murmuring as she ran about the room collecting odds and ends of possessions. All heavier considerations seemed to have sunk beneath this frothing and bubbling of joy.

Wendy gazed at her. *Odd* Zina was.

"Are you coming to London with me?" Zina demanded airily.

"I've got to go back to Oxford in half an hour . . . " Wendy hadn't expected this—casual riotousness in Zina. "Did you have a lot of champagne, Zina?"

"*Goose*—none at all . . . " Zina threw down a comb and seized Wendy by the shoulders:

"Wendy . . . darling, *darling, DARLING!* I'm so *dreadfully* happy."

She spun round and flopped down laughing on to the bed.

Wendy looked at her wonderingly.

"Queer comic you are—all that drama in my room last night, and now—*this!*"

Zina got up and went to the dressing-table, and re-adjusted her hat.

"But that's *over*—that was *yesterday!*"

Wendy said with affectionate irony, watching her sister's face in the glass. "That's your philosophy. . . ."

Zina only laughed.

"You'll let me know, Zina——" Wendy was anxious, trying now to get her back to reality from *another* side— " . . . Tell me, my dear, *immediately* when it's all quite fixed up and certain."

"I will—though it is already—the Fates have suddenly fallen in love with me."

"Don't forget, Zina—to tell me—*please!*"

"Colin and I will come down to Oxford and see you."

"Please do, then. I must go now."

Zina turned and gave her a delighted childish hug.

"*Good-bye,* darling," she called after her down the corridor: "Thank you for your services in the *election!*"

Zina left alone, gathered together the remainder of her

possessions. She glanced at the pin-cushion, and wondered . . . a note? She laughed off the absurd notion. George for the moment was utterly unreal to her . . . and, in a way, so was Colin. She merely knew, felt with every movement, with every beat of her heart, with the dance of every silly thought through her mind, that she was happy.

But she paused outside the room which was being used as Charles' night-nursery. The hotel "boy" was taking down her suitcases.

She stealthily opened the door. The curtains were drawn, and Nannie was out, for Charles was having his afternoon sleep.

She crept through the shadows of the room to his cot (Charles regally travelled with a white cot of his own). A bar of light filtering between the curtains lit up the face of the teddy-bear who lay, his button-eyes alert, on the pillow beside his friend's auburn head. Zina hesitated for a moment.

Her exhilaration fizzled out. The solid, unquestioning defencelessness of the child, asleep on his white, frilled pillow, caught at her heart. It was like—she had felt about George last night—that kind of unwary—helplessness of his. Queer—that she hadn't loved either of them. . . . This funny, square little boy. He didn't love her much, either. Anyway, he wouldn't care very much. And surely—George would be very, very good to him. . . .

She bent and kissed the round forehead—and the teddy-bear's arm tickled her cheek. Her lips rested for a moment on the warm, fragrant skin. And she realised that she had given this life being, that what was scarcely more than a driven wayward impulse on her part, a freak of fears and self-indulgence, had brought about this new warm life, this little boy, whom she couldn't even really love. Before him was a whole span of years, with all that it might give—or take from him because of *her*. And it came upon her that this had been her greatest betrayal of the responsibility to life. . . . This facile irresponsibility toward new life and new spirit.

She left him—and went out and wept bitterly.

. . . . .

And even when she reached her parents' flat in London three hours later, she could only seek out Cynthia—and sit and cry. Cynthia was perturbed, but gentle.

"Zina—tell me, when you feel better, my darling. . . . You see, I don't understand. . . ." She took the cold hand and held it fast. "We've simply heard that—that George has won . . . "

Zina articulated, "Yes. . . . But, Mummie. . . . Colin . . . !"

Then Cynthia understood. She said no more, but waited for the sobbing to grow quiet.

" . . . Mummie. . . . I've left—Charles. . . . Mummie . . . is it *dreadful* of me? I know it is. . . . He's so little . . . and I . . . I *began* him!" she sobbed quaintly. "*Poor* little devil . . . Mummie—I *had* to leave him. I must, because—of Colin. That's stronger than me—Colin, I mean . . . I might have stayed (I don't know really. *really*) if George had lost—and needed me. . . . But they don't, Mummie—not George *or* Baby—not—as Colin and I need each other. . . ." She glanced up urgently, under reddened eyelids: "You do *see*, Mummie. . . . It's too strong for me—I can't help it . . . his coming back like this. And I must go to him. . . . You *do* see?"

"How did you—see him again?"

Zina brokenly explained and added:

"But you *knew*, Mummie—didn't you? You and daddy?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you . . . ?"

"Colin asked your father to say nothing under the circumstances, because he thought you were very happily married. We let him think that because it seemed more merciful. Your father got him a correspondent's job in Vienna, to help him to be away from you. . . ."

Zina drew back: "But, Mummie, wouldn't you *ever* have told me?" She was cold at the vision of herself going on and on to old age, and never knowing that Colin was alive after all.

"I—we decided lately that you *ought* to be told. Your father was waiting to ask Colin before he told you. And then apparently Colin only returned to England the other

day, and went almost directly to this election, so your father hadn't seen him." She added: "I believe he went round to Lowndes Street to see him about five o'clock, he's probably there now. Colin rang him up this morning."

Zina was thinking of something more distant.

"Mummie—am I right? Or terribly wrong? I can't love anyone else," she went on hurriedly, " . . . it doesn't seem so horribly wrong to me, in spite of George—and Charles, and everything. It's like coming out of a dark tunnel. I know I went into it deliberately, but I was, anyway, sort of blind with wretchedness. I didn't care where I went. You know, don't you, Mummie?—that all that was why I've been so hard and unkind to you? I just felt all frozen inside, and I wanted to be harsh. I felt cruel, and I was afraid of you being too sweet to me because that hurt so. I've been so awful and unfeeling to you about John. Oh, Mummie!"

"Zina, darling—I understood—you mustn't mind."

"But I do, I do!"

"Hush, darling!"

They were both silent now, looking at one another with a new comprehension. At last Zina said:

"How strange of you not to feel absolutely that I ought to stay with George. I remember your saying to me once that 'not getting on' was self-indulgence."

Cynthia said with a flash of her whimsicality:

"To quote the great 'Crichton'—'Circumstances alter cases.'"

"And yet it's frightfully hard on George."

"It is. But you were being hard on him when you married him. This is all merely aftermath."

"But why don't you try and persuade me to stay with him?"

"Because it's your life and your decision. Because, as Meredith says, 'The whole of life is fixed.'"

Zina ironically echoed: "'We are betrayed by what is false within'—sort of moral indigestion."

Cynthia urged:

"I can only say one thing, Zina darling. I can't advise you which course is right or wrong for you. There's so much right and wrong in any course, and you are a grown-up woman with your own views and responsibilities. But

one thing you must face: that whichever course you choose must mean sacrifice of some kind. If you stay with George after all you must give up all thought of Colin and live George's life. But if you go to Colin, you must be prepared to have a less easy life, to be cut off from the kind of luxury and public approval you've been used to living in. Your whole atmosphere will change——"

"But I want that."

"You may not—really."

"It'll be worth it."

"It will, if you can love him enough, unselfishly enough."

Zina turned to her mother, her brown eyes like mountain pools in the sun.

"I believe I can," she said, and to Cynthia she seemed hardly more than a child—impetuous, maddeningly yet somehow enchantingly irresponsible, hovering between tears and laughter, ecstasy and despair; lovely and futile, and generous and selfish. An absurd, beautiful, questionable element to be fused with the life of any man.

XXIII

Colin stood alone in the drawing-room at Lowndes Street. He heard the front door shut at Edgar's departure.

He went to the window and drew the curtains, shutting out the lamplit street. Edgar's final words still seemed to linger in the room, to circle round in silent arabesques: "I think that she will come back to you, Colin. It is wrong, and yet it is essentially right that she should. Her life now would be as impossible without you as yours without her. Your love for each other cannot be everything, but it is better than nothing." And Colin saw again Edgar's deep, gentle look, and felt the powers of sympathy and tolerance and humour that were behind that look. "I think that she will come back to you, Colin!"

Colin moved restlessly to and fro. He so wanted her to be happy. That came to him as supremely his desire; greater even than his longing for her, this desire, whose uncertainty of fulfilment wracked and unnerved him, that she should somehow be made happy.

He looked back over the course of his own life, and beheld across a chasm, across a darkened chaos of years, himself

before the war: himself and Zina. The gay smooth solidity of it all, of that whole existence, filled him with a strange envy. Life all set out as for a tournament—green and scarlet and gold, the glint of armour and the zest of adventure. The astonishing confidence and brilliance; a myriad pennons of hopes and beliefs flying in the clear air. Queer how that had all passed into a fairy tale: a tiny jewelled world infinitely remote and unreal—the charming absurdity of a dolls' play in a dolls' theatre. And he thought: "She may believe she's coming back into just that kind of world. How far does she realise the change of texture and atmosphere, the changes in me that she'll come to?" And the little jewelled world seemed to splinter to fragments which he beheld at his feet as "the present," as all that he could offer her. Sordid, futile fragments.

It was so incredible, what one could come to—taking her from another man, from her child—*if* she came. Still, she mightn't come now. At least he'd somehow checked himself, checked the overwhelmingly urgent impulse just to take her, when she so amazingly and wonderfully wanted to come, and to go away, damning all conventions and circumstances. At least he'd made himself give her time to think it over, to realise what she'd have to give up, and how little she might find in him, and with him. And then instinctive knowledge of her made him wonder how much she would really "think."

The air round him seemed tautened, ready to crack with his suspense.

He knew, he'd heard at his club after luncheon that Barrett-Saunderson was "in." She might be in London now, or she might simply write to him; or perhaps, nothing. And he realised, with this swift supposition that she might just ignore him, how in the last three days her decision had become the pivot of his whole being.

With a cool inconsequence he remembered Hope. That scene in her room in Vienna. He wondered if he'd treated her badly. But that didn't seem to matter now.

He moved about the room like a blind man looking for something. When a taxi went past in the street he shuddered from head to foot. He felt, fantastically, his heart beating in hot rapid beats behind his eyes.

Suddenly the telephone bell rang. It was as though the edge of a saw cut across his nerves. It rang and seemed to penetrate his forehead and ring and scream in his head.

He went unsteadily across the room and took up the receiver.

"Yes?"

"Can I speak to Mr. Colin Russell?"

"Speaking!"

"Colin!"

"Who is it?" The receiver shook in his hand.

"Colin! It's me, Zina."

"Yes."

"Colin darling!"

"What d'you mean?"

The voice had a queer break:

"I mean, Colin darling——"

"*What?*"

" . . . love you," said the voice and rang off.

Colin put down the receiver with extraordinary circumspection.

XXIV

Colin helped Zina down to the platform at Oxford. Zina looked round:

"Wendy said she'd meet us."

Then they saw her coming towards them through the crowd. She took both their hands.

"I'm so frightfully glad you've come."

She preceded them out through the barrier. Zina touched Colin's arm:

"D'you realise the last time I came here you met me when I came up for Commem, in 1914?"

He nodded. He remembered waiting (a hot day, and he had put on clean white flannels) and Zina jumping out of the train, and her hair had come down on one side because she was so excited.

"I wish you could have come down for luncheon," Wendy said. She hailed a taxi and the three of them climbed in.

Zina glanced at Colin, but he wasn't looking at her: he was still thinking of that hot day, and Zina arriving, that last summer term before the war.

"We had our interview with George this morning," Zina said: her tone was naïve. (She might have said "We had ices at Gunter's.")

"What was he like?"

The taxi was speeding them through that pinkish mediocre half-mile of town separating the station from the older, more gracious Oxford.

Colin awoke to her question:

"He was like an animal one's hit for no reason. He was hurt, and didn't understand the whole incredible affair, and then he was so thoroughly decent that I wanted to shrink away." Colin's tone was bitter, but he softened at Zina's wide, perturbed look.

"He said he'd divorce me of course, since I wanted him to——"

Wendy asked:

"D'you think he does mind terribly?"

Zina hesitated. "It's more his pride than anything." She sat up as the taxi drove into Carfax and turned up the Corn.

"I told him to drop us at my abode first," Wendy said. "I thought we'd have tea in my rooms and then wander about."

"Colin's never beheld a woman's college from within, have you, darling?"

"In my young days," Colin smiled, "we didn't see very much of the women. I believe it's much more mixed now."

They got out at Somerville gates.

"Much," said Wendy.

Zina returned the smile of the rosy-faced porter; he appeared a friendly kind of Gabriel.

"But aren't there lots of rules?"

"There are of course," said Wendy, "But 'Les Désenchantées' wouldn't be in it if one kept them all."

Wendy's room overlooked the College gardens.

"Do please sit down, anywhere." She swept a heap of pink crêpe-de-chine off the armchair. "I've been sewing all the morning," she explained.

Colin began to laugh.

Wendy put the kettle on the fire:

"What are you laughing at, Colin?"

He shook his head: "Oh, just you!" He remembered that Wendy had always made him laugh.

Zina, ensconced in the armchair, dreamily surveyed them both. They had always been fun together, Colin and Wendy.

"D'you remember all the lovely drawings and poems you used to do for me, Colin!" Wendy remarked, making the tea. She was pretty, Colin thought—none of Zina's "loveliness," Zina's kind of soft glamorous quality, but with a decisive piquant charm of her own.

"Jam, Zina?"

"Thank you."

Wendy handed Colin his tea.

"Don't spill it on the sofa, 'cos it's really my bed," she implored.

"Very well. The 'make-up' is rather good."

"Oh, cushions can always make anything look like anything else!"

"Cryptic remark!"

Wendy laughed. Then she said, abruptly:

"I suppose I'm entertaining sinners unawares."

Zina looked at her vaguely:

"Silly goose."

"What are your plans?" Wendy addressed them both.

Colin hesitated. "I suppose to wait until the divorce is through, and then marry. I think we shall live abroad for a few years anyway. We both want to get away."

"But what'll you do, Colin?"

"I can get a good deal of reviewing and regular literary work, articles and things, for English papers."

"I see. And you, Zina?"

Zina's smile rested on Colin.

"I? I shall just live."

Her words died out and quiet held them. The first faint azure veils of dusk fell on the trees and gardens outside.

Zina said at last:

"It looks like the wood in 'Dear Brutus.'"

The blue veils deepened.

"I haven't seen it," Colin said.

Zina still gazed out, and her face was turned from him.

"It's about whether people would work out their lives at all differently, if they were given a second chance . . . "

Wendy glanced at Colin, "You know the quotation?" she said,

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves that we are underlings.

He nodded.

"Yes."

"Cigarette?" she proffered the box.

"Thanks."

The same vague speculation wound itself about all three of them.

"I wonder!" Colin said at last.

The room was almost dark now.

"So do I." Wendy threw the stub of her cigarette into the fireplace.

Colin could just, by the glow of the fire, discern Zina's profile, a phosphorescent cameo.

"Sometimes," he said, "I believe it is too much in our stars. Sometimes the stars in their courses are too strong for us, or else our own small stars are knocked out of the sky by comets and strange portents. It's difficult not to be an underling when all the heavens go mad."

A clock chimed somewhere out in the deep evening.

"What's that?" Zina asked.

Wendy got up and switched on the light and looked at her watch, and they all blinked strangely.

"Quarter to six," she said.

Zina rose lazily:

"I think I must go in and see an old friend of Mummie's who lives in Holywell. I promised I would. Have you been yet, Wendy"?

"Mm. I went once. Never again. She told me it was a pity I wasn't more like my mother, and that the women were ruining Oxford. I said I thought, if anything, that Oxford was ruining the women."

"Wendy, you are monstrous!"

"Well, I resent being treated like a Jezebel let loose in an exemplary monastery. All the old ladies in Oxford think of nothing but sex."

. . . . .

Wendy and Colin left Zina in Holywell and strolled on, down Longwall Street towards Magdalen.

They walked side by side without speaking. The echoes of their footfalls rang down the street and were blotted out in the shadows of the crenellated wall towering beside them, guarding unknown sanctities from the stares of the flat, irregular houses opposite. They turned, at the corner, into the High.

Magdalen tower rose toward a crescent moon; rose, perfectly wrought out of shadow, to a magic oblivion of the life that dreamed and stirred and hurried below: the flow of the river, the small creatures flitting about quadrangles, scurrying along the street, or over the bridge, the haze of golden and tawny light rising and falling in luminous tides against the buildings with the passing of brilliant or dimmer traffic, buses and cars and bicycles and carts. The buses seemed to Wendy to come over the bridge like dragons, glaring and rattling their joints, the cars were swift, flying things, the bicycles unsteady glow-worms.

Colin and Wendy plunged through Magdalen lodge, through a crowd of lounging undergraduates.

Colin turned to Wendy as they paused in the quadrangle by the War Memorial. He glanced back at the lodge:

"They make me feel a hundred." He tried to laugh off the betraying wistfulness of his voice.

"Where were your rooms, Colin?"

"New Buildings, until my last year."

Two scholars came through the lodge, passed and disappeared under an archway, their black gowns blowing out behind them.

"I've got to dine in Hall to-night," one of them said.

Another group sauntered past talking and laughing, then two more, Wendy recognised the couple. They saw her and paused.

"You're coming to lunch to-morrow?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Good. I've got a lot of new records to try."

They nodded cheerfully and passed on.

"It's your Oxford now, Wendy!"

"Only for the moment."

They passed the Chapel and wandered through to the dark cloisters and from the cloisters through a tunnelled passage to moonlit spaces of turf.

Across the spaces they discerned the "New Buildings," the Georgian façade, with windows asleep, set like a background for a revel of elegant ghosts.

"Shall you mind living abroad, Colin?" Wendy glanced at his still profile.

"In some ways, Wendy. But it's the best course, for a time anyway."

Their voices were unreal under the moon. They stood half-hypnotised by the scene before them, the silvered spaces, the remote pale façade, the blotted trees of the deer-park. A perfect sympathy held them, isolated their two spirits in these dim radiances and petrified tides of shadow.

"You're unhappy, Colin!"

"And terribly happy, both."

"Do you think you're doing wrong?"

"There wasn't, in the end, any other way out. It was stronger than ourselves."

"Your love for each other?"

"Not quite that. Our need of each other."

"You mean, in a way, it's weakness."

"Perhaps, a kind of selfishness. Only perhaps a certain happiness is justification. Our lives had been so broken and spoiled and messed about."

"In a way it's my fault, or me and Fate. If you hadn't come face to face with her you'd have gone on alone?"

"Yes."

"You could have. But Zina couldn't, once she knew."

"No. And once I knew that she wasn't happy, it would have been almost unbearable. . . ."

A figure flitted past them.

"I think Zina's right to think it's more George's pride than anything——"

"But that can hurt."

"But not for very long."

Colin hesitated:

"And the little boy?"

"I believe you mind that most."

"Yes."

"Zina doesn't. He didn't care immensely for her. Children aren't so surprised as grown-ups about people they're used to disappearing."

"Perhaps not."

Wendy said suddenly: "D'you remember that poem you did about the Diplodicus?"

"Yes." He saw her again, small and tubby under a flopping hat. Then he reverted to her earlier question: "Doing wrong? I've been asking myself that more or less ever since you motored me into Casterbury, Wendy. It's the sort of question that forces one into a corner. And yet it's so impossible *always* to get a clear answer. This being 'hot for certainties,' that's so much a part of youth I think. Sometimes the issues are so many, and the whole problem so obscure." They began slowly to pace the gravel walk and Wendy had a sense of exultation that he should speak to her like this, a sudden warm intimate gratitude. "This whole situation, it doesn't seem to fit in to the accepted neat partitions of right and wrong."

"It was Zina who brought about the situation in a way."

"You mean wrongly. I don't agree. It was something much bigger than Zina."

"The war?"

"Yes. That's what I've come to more and more, that it hasn't been essentially anybody's 'fault'; it was a set of circumstances with a kind of fantastic strength that, that one hadn't been prepared for, or even been able to imagine. My shell-shock, losing my memory like that, Zina alone in the kind of world she was least prepared to deal with by her upbringing, character, everything; she'd been brought up, we all had (madly, considering the condition of the world) to an accepted security, social, financial, moral: to postulate safety. And when the whole fabric thundered to atoms like that, she instinctively played for safety, to get back even a kind of skeleton of her native security. It was only too grimly natural. And then I resurrect like that, and one's tripped into such a tangle of rights and wrongs and desires and inhibitions."

"Because she's married."

"I suppose it comes to that, though not from the merely conventional point of view. It isn't just that, that her

giving up everything for me breaks up her status, or brings her up against prejudice. It's that—that in taking her I'm not only letting her risk so much safety and comfort, letting her risk such a terrible amount simply for me (or her idea of me), but one's hurting other people, tearing so many live strands that have grown round her."

"But she—you couldn't go away from her now, Colin."

"No—I couldn't. We've come back too strongly to each other. That's greater than anything else for us, and that's why all the kind of smaller cruelties and wrongs of what we're doing do go to the wall. It's the supreme thing that's left to us. I could leave her now, although I can't forget the other significances of what I'm doing. We seem to have been left with just this one thing that has, in spite of everything, a reality and beauty and value."

They paused again in their walk and Wendy looked up at him.

"I wonder, if you hadn't seen her again, whether you wouldn't have found something else worth while."

"Perhaps," he said strangely, and he met Wendy's look. "Even now, when I know that I love Zina, and that my happiness is almost more than I can bear, sometimes, after the last years, I wonder whether I'm justified, whether I'm not running away from outside things, from other problems that one ought to face. When there's so much to be built up again. That's what I mean when I say that it is in a way wrong, not even merely from a private point of view, that it takes the strength of one's mind and spirit too much.

"One saw, in Vienna, a kind of symbol of everything that the war's left to be repaired. There it was supremely, physical misery, physical collapse and starvation and degradation, fearful uncertainty and hopelessness. But there's so much of that everywhere, in the whole moral and mental atmosphere, uncertainty and hopelessness."

They paced again to and fro, their footsteps crunching lightly on the path.

"Just at first after the war there was a kind of ecstatic atmosphere. People told each other it had all been worth while; they ignored the wreckage, looking for a new heaven

and new earth; and in that atmosphere it was easy for a man proclaiming ideals and hopes and beliefs in the future to be hailed as a prophet—Wilson—Lloyd George. And then when no swift miracles happened, and the millennium didn't set in, there came the reaction, and the prophets were hurled from power and people went grubbing back into the old ruts, and, because they were disenchanted they felt sickened with ideals and new plans and new worlds. They saw that the war hadn't been the great glamorous sacrifice, the magnificent battle, or even 'the war to end war.' They began to see that it had been cruelty and waste and incredible horror, that men had died had been maimed and tortured, and lives had been wrecked, and that still suspicion and greed of power and money seemed to rule the nations. And it's this, Wendy, this spirit of disenchantment, the hopelessness, the kind of defensive pathetic egotism that has to be fought, if there's to be any hope."

It emerged for Wendy, listening to Colin's words, that his life was typical of the waste of which he had spoken. It seemed to her that the circumstances of his love for Zina (those circumstances with "a fantastic strength") shut him in, enclosed his spirit, barriers thrown up out of the wreckage. She saw that without Zina now his life would be no life, and yet with her it might be only half a life. For she knew that in the degrees of human value Colin was greater than Zina.

He was speaking still of the future, and of how the battle against disenchantment was for the new generations, for Wendy and those whose lives were new and vivid and strong to use as weapons.

And Wendy thought, "I could love Colin," and she saw the life they could have made together, the beauty and clearness and strength of which he spoke.

They turned now and walked back through the vaulted darkness of the cloister, and past the chapel, and out into the quad.

From a glowing window, high up, music rippled into the night—sweetness and the slumbrous throbbing of pain. Waiting for them by the lodge they saw Zina and she seemed to each of them a part of the moonlight.

EPILOGUE

REMEMBRANCE DAY, 1924

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain:

And time remembered is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

SWINBURNE (Chorus from *Atalanta*).

EPILOGUE

I

NOVEMBER 11, 1924. Edgar made his way along the Strand towards his habitual luncheon place. In the lapel of his overcoat he wore a big red poppy with a shining black centre and a green stalk, which was reproduced in equal or lesser degrees in the buttonholes of every man or woman hurrying or drifting past him.

Remembrance Day! He looked into the faces that surged to and fro, and it touched him as some kind of a miracle that two hours ago, they had, all these faces, been poised like millions of frozen flowers, tense and uplifted while that great stillness held London. And in those moments, in that utter stillness, they must have remembered.

He saw now in these myriad fleeting faces expectation or annoyance, anxiety or pleasure or greed, simplicity or cunning, health or sickness, bewilderment or conceit, gentleness or ill-temper; purpose or regret: but no longer remembrance.

The poppies darted and bobbed past him like little lamps. (Danger signals?)

Poppies for Remembrance. But he thought queerly, "Poppies for oblivion, for sleep." And other words came to him, lovely and fragmentary, like the distant cooing of wood-pigeons on a summer day:

"Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care." The faces surged past him, and the bobbing scarlet lamps. Another echo:

"To die, to sleep; to sleep, perchance to dream." (To sleep, perchance to dream——!)

"When we have shuffled off this mortal coil." "This mortal coil!" Queer, how that little man, so greatly obscured in the heart of England, had understood.

II

Zina heard Colin step out behind her on to their veranda. From the height of Fiesole she gazed out over the Arno valley, over the huddled ochre roofs and darker towers of Florence, and the flat shining river that wound its way into blue mistiness toward far ranges of the Appenines.

He stood for a moment behind her, watching the ruddiness of the sunlight on her hair and its caress on the white nape of her neck.

She turned and held out a bunch of roses she had just brought from the garden. "The last ones, I'm afraid, but in November!" she said.

He buried his face in the cool, perfect petals and their scent caught at his heart.

She asked: "Have you finished those two reviews?" and put the roses on a wicker table and turned again to the view.

"Yes." He came, stood beside her, leant against one of the concrete pillars and his gaze followed hers.

"Do you realise we've been here nearly two years?" he asked. His eye travelled from summit to summit of the cypress trees that stood like sentinels about the garden. "I read once," he added, "that the souls of the dead hover round the tops of trees."

She nodded. "Possibly." She forgot to answer his question.

They were silent, shoulder to shoulder. Abruptly she said:

"Colin, do you know I was jealous just now of those roses?" She didn't look at him.

"Zina!" Her profile, the misted brown eye and trembling mouth wouldn't turn to admit his reproach.

"I'm twenty-nine."

"Zina, absurd child, dearest!"

"A long 'used-up' twenty-nine!"

Her voice and his sense of what she was feeling wrenched at his love for her.

"Zina, don't—don't, darling!"

Still she wouldn't look. When she was with him she was sometimes possessed, as to-day, supremely, by an overwhelming, gripping humility.

"What did you think," she asked in a sickened strained voice, "when those roses were against your face?"

"I believe I thought, 'Oh God, how lovely!'"

"Why?"

He was impatient, pitiful, exasperated with this ineradicable utter wrongness of hers about herself.

"I don't know."

"I do," she enumerated in a precise listless voice, "because they're fresh and young and unspoiled, because they're sweet and fragrant and just awake to the sun, young and unspoiled——" She broke off as he wrenched her wrist and pulled her round to face him.

"You fool! You utter little fool!" He took her by the shoulders and in the depths of his greenish eyes she could see fleeting lights and shadows, ecstasy and pain. Holding her, he could feel her tremble; and yet, at his words, resentful, mocking, entreating, he was conscious that a sweet strange happiness stirred in her veins, a reassurance born of his anger and scorn and imprecation.

He ended, breathless, shaking from head to foot:

"D'you suppose that if I cared for you, because of things, deeds, qualities, because of your ludicrous and utterly unimportant age, that I should love you as I do? That I should have stolen you from another man? From your baby? From the life you ought to have stayed in? That I should be living this impossible sort of life here in Italy with you? Should I have gone against all sense and principle, knocked down all my convictions at one insane blow, and built up a whole new existence and belief in their stead, just for your handful of qualities! You little fool, my dear, harbouring the notion all this time that I might be disillusioned! That was over, long ago. D'you suppose I don't see, my darling, that you've got half a dozen rather second-rate qualities, that you're weak, and a little self-deceitful, and badly irresponsible, and hard where your own immediate emotions aren't concerned, and spiritually slothful? God! Have you ever supposed that it was for your 'beautiful character' or 'beautiful face' or 'beautiful mind' that I love you as I do? Your character has lovely bits, but it's weedy. I adore your face, but you aren't as radiant as you were at eighteen; and your mind is just hopelessly and ludicrously lazy! Don't you understand it's *you* that I love, *you*, *you*, *you*—and

that you're so utterly a part of life for me, of the very essence of living that I don't know any more which is you and which is life and which is me." Swiftly he released her shoulders, bent to kiss her forehead and strode out into the mellow sunshine.

And Zina watched him, watched his easy, graceful striding down toward the big cypress tree. And suddenly her soft eyes lit up and a smile tremulously curved one corner of her mouth.

III

Cynthia slowed down as they drove, she and Nanny, into the main street of Pelham village, for Nanny had wanted to go to the Armistice memorial service in the church. (Nanny's tranquillity of soul was undisturbed by the quality of Mr. Grimmer's voice.) She had intended to go down for the day by train, but Cynthia, at the last moment, had wanted to drive her down in the family two-seater (mostly used by Wendy, but abandoned to her parents during her terms at Oxford). Cynthia hadn't wanted to be alone on this day in the flat in London.

"What time is your service, Nanny?"

"I think three o'clock, m'lady."

"It's almost that now. The crowd's collecting already round the War Memorial."

"You won't stay?"

"I think not, Nanny." They drew up outside the churchyard gate. "I think I shall go on and come back and fetch you. I'm tempted to trespass in our old grounds."

Nanny got out. People from all parts of the village, dressed in their Sunday clothes, were hastening toward the steps of the Memorial, a tall marble cross (To THE FALLEN, in black capitals) which stared blankly over the assembling crowd at the vicarage gates. In the porch of the church Cynthia espied Mr. Grimmer marshalling the choir boys, who looked like a flock of unwilling penguins.

Cynthia pressed the accelerator. Down the street the village Territorials were approaching, a column of khaki, rigid pink faces, rhythmic tramping, an officer, upright, square-shouldered, marching beside them. Passing the column she glanced along these marching ranks, at the officer, George! His eyes were fixed straight ahead, his

mouth sternly and complacently set under the brown moustache. He didn't see her, he was, to the exclusion of all else, fulfilling his privilege and his duty. His command, curt and loud, followed her speeding course:

"Eyes right!"

And as she receded up the village, more faintly, but distinctly she heard:

"Right wheel."

. . . . .

Nanny went, after the Memorial Service, alone into the church. It was empty and cold. She went and sat in the pew belonging to "the Court." It didn't seem to her that the pew really belonged to "these new people!"

A shaft of light fell across the worn slabs on the floor in front of the pew: but her gaze rested upward on the plain stone tablet set in the wall before her. She read dimly, for she had mislaid her glasses. She knew it by heart though, knew it in her heart:

"JOHN RICHARD SINCLAIR RENNER.
KILLED IN ACTION, OCTOBER 18, 1917."

Nanny knelt down and rested her head on her hands: the words read in the service out there by the "Memorial" came back to her, sank like a blessing into her spirit: "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them."

"In the sight of the unwise they seem to die: and their departure is taken for misery."

"And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace."

. . . . .

Cynthia halted the car in a lane and took a familiar field-path leading to the ferry and across the ferry to Pelham woods.

The air was quiet as though the soft grass and wet hedges had sunk to slumber; the sky, a vault of grey pearl-tinted light whose rifted clouds were mirrored in the river between the grotesque reflected ranks of willow stumps. Beyond these silvery-hazed clouds there was light, and beneath the wet green drowsiness of the earth there were beating pulses of vitality. But the stillness of the air, interrupted only

by some tiny fleeting movement or sound, was precious, like the sleep of a child.

Cynthia pulled herself across the ferry: a water rat looked up at her with eyes like dark dewdrops, and dived silently, leaving, for a second, an arrow-head dent on the surface of the water. She stepped on to the further bank and took the path toward the woods.

The woods were a vast skeleton cathedral; beech trunks, smooth grey pillars towering to twisted vaults and strange arches, endless vistas of these grey-pillared aisles and high fantastic tracery. The ground was carpeted, drifted up with leaves. Their colour conjured up Zina, glowing and pale brown. Drifts of beech leaves and the acrid fragrance of dead summers.

Cynthia sat down on a fallen log ("taking Sanctuary!"). The incense of the earth permeated her senses, rich and mystical, and in the silence of the great trees were sounds that had died, naughty delicious laughter and stealthy whispering and little high childish cries of delight or excitement. And memories, peeping round the big tree trunks. Memories with bare brown legs and blue smocks; somebody with tousled hair like beech leaves and soft brown eyes; somebody ("Baby," she knew it was called that) fat and rosy rolling about on the moss and gurgling to itself; and somebody lurking among the trees.

Somebody in a crumpled linen suit, with hair like curled sunshine and a solemn mouth and blue eyes that crinkled at the corners when he began to laugh.

IV

Wendy sat in a corner at "the Diplomats" with a contemporary. They had motored up from Oxford together, an illicit expedition to attend an "Armistice Gala Night." The Contemporary was at Christ Church.

Wendy defended herself from a white plush pig that was hustled through the air down from the gallery. The management's conception of "Gala" was showers of plush pigs and a greater crowd of clientéle than could find space to sit, much less dance.

Wendy said for the third time in the evening:

"It's no use *attempting* to move." She watched the

crowd packed limb to limb, cheek to cheek on the passage of floor space left between the tables.

The Contemporary readjusted his horn-rimmed glasses. "It's tantalising when the band's so utterly marvellous. Have some more champagne?"

"No thanks, my dear."

"I shall, and then I may think of something amusing to say to you."

Wendy fingered the camelia on the shoulder of her brief scarlet dress.

"It's not worth wasting your wit with such a tumult going on."

He turned and regarded her through his absurd spectacles, despite which it was apparent that he was a good-looking young man.

"You should have made an effect by wearing a sort of Proserpine wreath of poppies with that frock to-day."

"I'm sick of effects."

"Poseuse!"

"Poseur!"

He smiled good-naturedly. "All the young pose now because they feel that naturally they're so negative."

"Nonsense."

He sipped his champagne. "I suppose you're so ill-tempered because you feel I ought to be making love to you."

"I don't suffer from repressions of that sort. If I wanted you to make love to me I should bring it about that you did."

He looked a little hurt. "I suppose you think I haven't the knack of being amorous."

"No." She spoke negligently, "But we are so much better when we dance together. Otherwise——"

He laughed again.

"Otherwise we envy each other's 'bon-mots,' and wonder how much attraction, if any, we have for one another."

She laughed too. "Light my cigarette, my dear. We're a foolish couple."

He looked into her attractive, discontented little face. "Not more so than the rest of our set." He blew out the match.

"We all are," she said. She turned on him and the line of her mouth grew hard, her eyes a little piteous. "I suppose you realise why we're joining in this 'Gala' to-night?"

He nodded, and his look lost its "manner," and for a moment in all the hubbub and music and shrieking and clinking of plates and glasses, they were silent.

"My brother was killed," she said, and her mind travelled back to an October morning at school, a windy morning, and a room, a room with deep blue curtains and yellow chrysanthemums, a lethal chamber.

"My eldest brother was blinded by liquid fire," he said.

The music throbbed above the tumult; mechanically their shoulders swayed to the tune.

"It's rather a bloody world," he said. She let her hand rest in his.

"Sometimes it is."

"One just has to take the best of what comes."

She shook her head. "No, that isn't all."

"What else is there, in such a grotesque muddle as the sort of life we've inherited?"

(Colin's voice came back to her, Colin's words to her that day at Oxford, when he and Zina came to say good-bye: Colin and herself walking through Magdalen cloisters on that starry December evening, through the tunnelled archway, out into the quad flooded with moonlight, and a window, somewhere high up in that dark mass of buildings, like an oblong of red topaz, and somewhere someone playing the "Valse Triste," "At least you have your chance, Wendy, you and your generation, to try and straighten things out and get at life cleanly and rightly, to make for decency and beauty, and peace.")

Wendy looked round her. At the next table a tipsy girl was trying to make a speech. "And I rise to say——" She screamed with laughter and was applauded, thumped on the back. She swayed forward over the table. "—this blessed anniversary——" more screams of laughter: she fixed an eye on Wendy. "Vive l'Armistice!" She choked and collapsed laughing.

"What else is there?" the young man repeated.

Wendy stared before her (the topaz window, the haunting loveliness of the "Valse Triste").

"Too much else," she whispered on an indrawn breath.

THE END

Sylvia Thompson

Sylvia Thompson was born in Scotland, and most of her childhood was spent at Oxford. She wrote a novel at the age of sixteen when she was at Cheltenham. Later she went to Somerville College, Oxford, where she met Peter Luling, the artist, now her husband. She was a niece of Lady Meyer, and is related to Viscountess Erleigh, Lord Reading's daughter-in-law. Publications : 'Hounds of Spring'; 'Breakfast in Bed'; 'Chariot Wheels'; 'Helena'; 'A Silver Rattle'; 'Summer's Night' and 'Winter Comedy'.

PENGUIN BOOKS

1 ARIEL André Maurois
2 A FAREWELL TO ARMS Ernest Hemingway
3 POET'S PUB Eric Linklater
5 THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB Dorothy L. Sayers
6a THE MURDER ON THE LINKS Agatha Christie
7 TWENTY-FIVE Beverley Nichols
9 GONE TO EARTH Mary Webb
11 SOUTH WIND Norman Douglas
13 PATROL Philip MacDonald
15 FOUR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE E. Arnot Robertson
16 THE EDWARDIANS V. Sackville-West
17 THE INFORMER Liam O'Flaherty
20 EREWHON Samuel Butler
21 OUR MR. WRENN Sinclair Lewis
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23 ESTHER WATERS George Moore
24 HANGMAN'S HOUSE Donn Byrne
25 NAVAL OCCASIONS 'Bartimeus'
26 ODD CRAFT W. W. Jacobs
27 MY MAN JEEVES P. G. Wodehouse
28 THE OWLS' HOUSE Crosbie Garstin
29 AUTOBIOGRAPHY (1) Margot Asquith
30 AUTOBIOGRAPHY (2) Margot Asquith
31 A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WORLD H. G. Wells
32 THE WAYWARD MAN St. John Ervine
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51 MORNING TIDE Neil M. Gunn
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53 DUSTY ANSWER Rosamond Lehmann
54 I AM JONATHAN SCRIVENER Claude Houghton
55 THE PARTY DRESS Joseph Hergesheimer
56 THE HOUNDS OF SPRING Sylvia Thompson
57 THE BLACK DIAMOND Francis Brett Young
58 THE POISONED CHOCOLATES CASE Anthony Berkeley
59 THREE WIVES Beatrice Kean Seymour
60 THE DARK INVADER Captain Von Rintelen